

S'pore scientists say black tea could lower risk of Parkinson's

BY JUDITH TAN

DRINKING black tea regularly could help prevent the onset of Parkinson's disease, according to a new study by Singapore scientists.

Those who drink 23 cups of the beverage a month are 71 per cent less likely to contract the brain-wasting disease, researchers from the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and National Neuroscience Institute report.

The results have led to optimism that the disease, which affects 300 new patients a year, can be beaten.

"Hopefully, in years to come, there may be a pill developed from black tea extracts to prevent its onset," said Dr Koh Woon-Puay, an assistant professor at the Yong Loo Lin medical school.

Scientists are not yet sure why black tea helps to prevent Parkinson's, but believe enzymes in the drink could hold the answer.

They do know, however, the health benefits are not linked to the tea's high caffeine content.

"There are ingredients in black tea other than caffeine that seem to be responsible for risk reduction," said Dr Koh.

The results of the study were published in the American Journal of Epidemiology late last year.

Parkinson's disease affects the middle part of the brain, which is associated with movement. Patients often shake and have difficulty with hand-eye coordination and walking.

About three in 1,000 Singaporeans over 50 years of age suffer from Parkinson's disease.

Dr Louis Tan, a senior consultant in the department of neurology at the National Neuroscience Institute, said 300 new cases are diagnosed each year.

"This number is predicted to increase to 500 every year by the year 2030," he said.

The study involved more than 63,000 Chinese men and women aged 45 to 74 who live in the heartland.

The results have led scientists to test the enzymes in black tea on cells and animals in a bid to unravel the drink's mystery.

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