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Wake up to what is in your teabag



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Campaign in UK draws attention to non-biodegradable material

A campaign in the UK has brought to the surface aspects of tea drinking hitherto ignored. Teabags, which we assume are made entirely of paper, also have nylon, thermoplastic, PVC or polypropylene. And every day, teabags are squeezed and dumped as food waste. Plastics take centuries to decompose.

Tea drinkers would like to have their teabags plastic free, but fully biodegradable paper teabags are expensive. Loose tea is the answer, say experts.



Gaurav Saria, owner, teamaster and chief, Infinitea says, "I am personally against teabags, and have not used them at Infinitea for 15 years now."

For optimum benefits, he advises loose leaf tea from a good estate that takes care to pack in the nutrition in the tea. "Teabag consumption is predominant in the developed world. In India, it is just 2-3% of the total consumption," he estimates.

Saria feels the price of biodegradable teabags is too steep for it to become mainstream in India soon.

Shashank Rawat, COO, My Tea House, emphasises whole leaf tea is of a higher grade than what is packed in teabags.

He makes it a point to serve whole leaf tea.

"If you really want to understand the character of tea, it has to be steeped at a certain temperature and that is possible only with whole leaf tea and not teabags," he says.

Campaign victory'

The campaign against plastic waste in the UK is at a turning point.

"A major retailer is in the final stages of developing a fully biodegradable paper teabag that does not contain plastic," reports The Guardian.

The retail co-operative is making Fairtrade 99 teabags, free of polypropylene, it says.

Polypropylene is a sealant used across the industry to enable teabags to hold their shape. The guilt-free brew is due to go on sale by the end of the year, the paper reported.



Plasticizers are substances added to teabags to increase their flexibility, transparency, durability, and longevity. Many studies have proved the links between cancer and the toxicity of plastic teabags. I feel lack of ethics has pushed many industries to be ruthless. They take advantage of ignorance. There are viable environment-friendly alternatives to plastic teabags.

Dr TV Ramachandra

Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science.

'No plastics'

Metrolife contacted Tata Global Beverages to ask about the plastic in teabags. Their response: "Sustainable sourcing is very important to us. Our teabags sold in India are made of chlorine-free paper and are therefore 100% biodegradable. They do not contain any harmful chemicals or plastics."

'I prefer tea leaves'

Juhi Chawla, Actor

Tea bags apparently are bleached to look pretty, so when you dip them in boiling water certainly some of that is leaching into your tea. I have avoided them totally ever since I heard about this. I prefer to use tea leaves as they are. I look for something in a glass jar. That makes me feel the tea company values quality over convenience and sales."

Teabag material

- * Manila hemp
- * Plastic
- * Wood pulp

(Manila hemp is a species of banana. Ingredients in a tea bag, according to BBC)