

Isobel Whitcomb on the benefits — if at all any — of hot lemon water

In a video on TikTok, a woman has a lemon in one hand and a mug in the other as she espouses the benefits of her beverage. Within a week of drinking hot lemon water daily, she said, you can expect to burn more calories, become more hydrated, harbour fewer toxins, and have a boosted immune system, better digestion, less bloating, smoother skin and more energy and focus.

Across social media, there are countless videos like it. But while sipping warm lemon water can be a refreshing and healthy way to start the day, the evidence for many of its benefits does not hold up, said Emily Ho, a professor of nutrition and the director of the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University in the US.

Here are some of the main claims associated with hot lemon water, and whether there is — or isn't — enough research to back them.

Hydration

Hot lemon water's main nutritional asset is that it's hydrating, Ho said. That's especially beneficial first thing in the morning, she added, when "you haven't had anything to drink all night".

The body needs to be hydrated to maintain its temperature, lubricate and cushion the joints, and remove waste through processes like sweating and urination. Good hydration is also associated with healthier skin, better mood and sharper thinking.

That said, there isn't anything special about lemon water, said Joan Salge Blake, a dietitian and clinical professor of nutrition at Boston University, US. You'd get the same benefits from a glass of regular water, a cup of herbal tea or even a cup of coffee. "Any fluid is going to hydrate you," she said.

Digestion

Fluid is essential for keeping your digestive system moving, whether it's spiked with lemon or not, said Judy Simon, a clinical dietitian and instructor at the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle, US.

In one 2020 study of more than 4,500 adults in Turkey, researchers found that those who drank the most water — more than eight cups per day — had a 29 per cent lower risk of developing constipation compared with those who drank the least water — less than four cups per day.

We couldn't find any stud-

ies that looked into how lemon water influences constipation, but there is some limited evidence that lemon juice might help break down food in the stomach by stimulating stomach acid secretion.

In one study published in 2022, researchers found that lemon juice sped up the rate at which the stomach emptied. But this study was small, Ho said, so the results should be taken with a grain of salt.

Some influencers claim that the citric acid in a lemon helps with digestion. That's plausible for some older adults, Ho said. As people age, it's common to start producing less stomach acid, which can make it more difficult to absorb nutrients from food and lead to heartburn and acid reflux. But there isn't much evidence that the small amount

of citric acid from a lemon can really help, Ho said.

Immunity

There is a kernel of truth in the idea that hot lemon water can benefit the immune system. Lemons are loaded with Vitamin C, Ho said. If you squeeze half of a large lemon into your cup, as many recipes suggest, that provides about a quarter of the recommended daily amount.

Vitamin C is essential for immune function and healing, and it acts as a powerful antioxidant that can thwart DNA damage.

But there isn't much evidence that you'll boost your immune system by consuming more Vitamin C — whether through supplements or hot lemon water.

In one review of more than 60 clinical trials, researchers

concluded that people who took high-dose Vitamin C supplements — at least 200 milligrams per day — didn't have fewer, shorter or less severe colds.

While true Vitamin C deficiencies can come with health concerns, Ho said, they are rare. According to one study published in 2023, researchers found that only about 7 per cent of adults aged 20 years and older in the US were deficient.

"You're not going to supercharge your immune system" by drinking hot lemon water, Salge Blake said.

Weight Loss

If you're drinking hot lemon water in place of a higher calorie beverage — like a sugary coffee drink — for example, it might help you lose weight, Simon said. However, there's

no solid evidence that hot lemon water has any measurable effect on weight or metabolism, she added.

Some research suggests that eating lemons and other citrus fruits could help stabilise blood sugar, Ho said. And long-term studies have found associations between citrus consumption and reduced risks for type 2 diabetes. But that evidence is still weak, Ho said.

The Bottom Line

Hot lemon water is a hydrating drink and a good replacement for sugary options, Salge Blake said — but it's not the cure-all that influencers promise. "There's nothing wrong with it," she said, "but there isn't really anything miraculous about it either."

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