Let's Have a Tea Party!

When I was very young, my mother would sit down with me almost every afternoon and we would have a tea party. Being from Panama this was a normal part of my mother's life growing up. My mother passed her tradition on to my sister and I, and we would sip on tea and share a little treat as our mother told us stories. Believe it or not, we actually used real china! Later as my mother went back to work and we were in school, we enjoyed tea with her on the weekends.

I grew up, went off to college, then medical school and all of a sudden had a family (or that's what it felt like). I had two very energetic crazy boys, but was convinced I could somehow share my mother's tradition with them. I bought a plastic tea set and when they were very, very young, Zack was 2ish and Jacob was almost 4 years old, we started having tea parties. They loved it! I poured real tea (decaffeinated of course-I'm not crazy enough to give caffeine to toddlers) and we had a little treat, often whole grain toast and honey. I can't believe it, but they actually sat still for this and seemed to enjoy it.

Drinking tea and afternoon tea or High Tea has been a long-standing tradition for thousands of years in other countries around the world. Recently, tea drinking has become more popular in the United States as well. **Did you know that there are actually health benefits to drinking tea??** According to Dr. Andrew Weil, founder and director of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona, "research finds that regular tea drinkers are at lower risk for cancer, heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis—and even bacterial and viral infections." Great! Just in time for cold and flu season! According to a 2014 Harvard University study, "tea, especially green tea is often said to be good for your health. Tea contains substances linked to a lower risk for heart disease, cancer and diabetes." The study goes on to explain that polyphenols found in tea have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Great news for tea drinkers.

Did you know that 2 cups of tea has the equivalent amount of antioxidant activity as 4 apples!!! Antioxidants are substances that help to prevent or delay cell damage. Antioxidants can be found in foods such as fruits and vegetables, as well as tea. The following types of teas can help you enjoy all these health benefits: black, green, oolong, Pu-Erh, and white tea.

Is tea ok for children?? Yes! As long as it is freshly brewed, decaffeinated, and has no added sugars, chemicals, or artificial sweeteners. Avoid bottled or canned teas. Currently my favorite tea is Numi Organic Moroccan Mint Green Tea which is decaffeinated. I also really enjoy Numi Organic Gunpowder Green Tea (this has caffeine so avoid it for your kiddos). I usually purchase my teas as loose leaf tea and mix the two together and make a pot of tea every afternoon for my staff. I also tell everyone that has a cold or upper respiratory infection to have a few cups of tea and give your children 2 cups of warm decaffeinated green tea with a little honey every day. **Please avoid honey in babies under a year old due to the potential for botulism which is deadly.**

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A few cups of warm green tea is much better than any cold or cough medicine for you and your kiddos. Our pediatric practice asks everyone, including adults, to avoid cold and cough medications for two reasons: they don't work and there are way too many side effects, this includes even the "natural" cough and cold meds. So have a tea party, enjoy some media-free time with your children and stay healthy!

If you would like more information about how to brew tea or the health benefits of tea check out these articles online: "Don't like Green Tea? Try These Healthy, Healing Options Instead" by Andrew Weil, MD December 3, 2015 or WebMD "Types of Teas and Their Health Benefits" March 2009.

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