

**FOOD & NUTRITION****Brewing up cleaner arteries**

Several studies have indicated that alcoholic drinks, especially wine and beer, can reduce a person's risk of heart disease. Researchers suspect that some of these heart benefits trace to a retarding of atherosclerosis, the accumulation of artery-clogging plaque. A Dutch study now finds that tea offers a good alternative—at least for women.

Johanna M. Geleijnse of Wageningen University in the Netherlands and her colleagues recruited nearly 3,500 residents of Rotterdam to their study. Most were in their mid 60s or older, and all were free of cardiovascular disease. X rays of one of the heart's arteries in each man or woman allowed the researchers to quantify atherosclerotic plaque.

Diet can play a significant role in the buildup of plaque, a risk factor for heart attacks. Because tea—rich in plaque-retarding antioxidants—has been linked to a reduced risk of fatal heart attacks (SN: 10/30/93, p. 278), Geleijnse's team collected detailed data on the tea-drinking habits of each participant.

In the Oct. 11 *ARCHIVES OF INTERNAL MEDICINE*, Geleijnse and her colleagues report that after they accounted for other predisposing factors, the prevalence and extent of plaque was greatest in those who drank the least black tea.

Those who downed a cup or two per day had roughly half the incidence of severe atherosclerosis seen in people who drank no tea. Four or more cups per day reduced the incidence of severe atherosclerosis to less than one-third that seen in tea abstainers.

The researchers point out that this trend observed in the combined group did not prove statistically significant among just the men. However, the incidence of severe plaque among women drinking four or more cups of tea daily was only one-quarter as high as in women who eschewed the brew.

— J.R.