

July 2026 Newsletter

Tea Jitters Explained: Caffeine, L-Theanine, Chaqi, and Why Tea Feels Different

*Many tea drinkers wonder why tea sometimes causes jitters, nervousness, calm focus, or even a sensation often called "tea drunk." The answer lies in the relationship between caffeine, L-theanine, brewing methods, tea varieties, and a concept known in tea culture as chaqi. In this month's Tea Tavern newsletter, we'll explore the science behind tea jitters and why different teas create different experiences. **[This is an SEO/AEO-optimized blurb; starting with this or putting it in any meta descriptions will help Tea Tavern get cited/"rank", insofar as ranking is still (kinda) a Thing. That said, if you don't like it don't go with it.]***

Every so often, a Traveler arrives at the tavern with an age-old question:

"Why does this tea make me feel this way?"

The experiences are as varied as the travelers themselves. Some feel a rush of energy. Others gain a sense of alertness that is sharp but still calm. It may be something more elusive to describe—a warmth spreading through the body, a heightened awareness, or a zen feeling that sits in the liminal state between relaxation and focus.

All of these experiences are fairly common amongst tea drinkers, and are generally grouped together under a single term: "jitters."

When one experiences jitters they are essentially under the spell of the magical brew that is ancient Chinese tea. But though not all tea-induced sensations are the same, being attentive to when one gets jitters can unlock an understanding that helps one choose teas beset suited to them, their preferences, and their brewing habits.

What, exactly, are "Tea Jitters"?

When most describe getting tea jitters, they are usually describing one of two very different experiences.

The first is what many would recognize as a [caffeine](#) response: shakiness, increased heart rate, cold sweats, dizziness, or a burst of nervous energy. These sensations are more likely to occur when drinking tea on an empty stomach or consuming large amounts of tea in a short period.

The second experience is something entirely different.

Many tea drinkers describe feeling a sense of clarity, openness, warmth, heaviness, or even mild euphoria. Some call it being "tea drunk." Others refer to it as a buzz, body feel, or simply a tea that has strong energy.

Though these two distinct experiences are often lumped together when discussed, they actually have very distinct causes.

The Balance Between Caffeine and L-Theanine

First, we must point out an important distinction between tea and another mystical beverage, coffee. Though coffee can also cause a caffeine reaction, those symptoms and that feeling is wholly different from tea jitters.

One reason tea jitters feel different from simply drinking too much coffee is the presence of L-theanine, a naturally occurring amino acid found in tea leaves.

L-theanine contributes to tea's flavor profile. It is also associated with feelings of a relaxed state of alertness. Not only is this not a caffeine reaction, but some research even indicates L-theanine can mitigate some of the less desirable impacts of caffeine.

The amount of L-theanine in a tea varies based on tea type, cultivation methods, and [brewing parameters](#). This is similar to how the caffeine level in a specific tea can vary depending on the tea's origin, harvest, and [processing techniques](#).

Both caffeine and L-theanine can exist in different ratios in different teas. That's why two cups of different tea may contain similar caffeine levels yet produce very different experiences for the drinker.

The Mystery of Chaqi

Among experienced tea drinkers, there is another concept that often emerges in conversation: chaqi (茶气).

Chaqi can be difficult to define because it describes personal experiences that are unique between individuals.

Depending on who you ask, chaqi may refer to:

- A feeling of physical warmth
- Increased awareness or focus

- Deep relaxation
- A sensation of energy moving through the body
- The perceived strength or character of a tea - this is what it most commonly means amongst Chinese speakers and practitioners of ancient Chinese medicine.

Chaqi, then, is not one single experience but rather an umbrella term for a collection of ways high quality Chinese teas can impact a person. Some Travelers notice chaqi immediately. Others may never experience it at all (there is nothing wrong with either the Traveler or the tea in this case).

Why Some Teas Just Feel Different Than Others

When it comes to chaqi – especially when the word is used to describe the body of the tea itself, not the impact it has on the person drinking it – tea is generally broken down into several categories.

- [Sheng Pu-erh](#)
- [Shu Pu-erh](#)
- Yancha (Rock Tea)
- Dancong [Oolong](#)

These teas are often described as having a more pronounced presence than lighter tea styles.

For example, young sheng pu-erh is sometimes described as energetic, lively, or even "wirey." In contrast, aged sheng pu-erh, like our [1995 Green Pu-erh](#), is often associated with a deeper, heavier, and more relaxing character. In the case of the 1995 Green Pu-erh, it's even been compared to BBQ sauce!

These are examples of teas from which their chaqi stems largely from how the teas are processed.

Ancient Trees, Terrace Gardens, and Tea Energy

Of course, the source of tea leaf itself can also impact its chaqi.

Teas harvested from ancient or old-growth tea trees, or trees that are over a century old, are commonly reported to provide a stronger body feel than teas produced from younger plantation-grown bushes.

This may be because mature trees have extensive root systems that reach deeper into ancient soil, using minerals and nutrients unavailable to younger plants to grow and thrive.

Indeed, the complex and ancient brewing process used to produce [Aini Bamboo Shu Pu'erh](#), harvested from ancient forests, speaks to this truth. The bamboo brewing process is used to, in part, lighten the heavy, mineral-rich flavor of the raw tea leaves.

Scientific studies bear out this truth in a more modern, concrete way. Multiple studies have found pu-erh tea to have measurable differences in chemical composition from tea sourced from ecological forests or terrace plantations. Those chemical differences may be the key to unlocking the mystery as to why some teas produce a richer body sensation while others feel more stimulating or caffeine-forward.

That said, there is still magic in enjoying a cup of tea, and researchers agree that chemistry alone cannot fully explain every tea experience. Still, the evidence does suggest that origin and cultivation methods play an important role in what ends up in the cup.

How to Reduce Unpleasant Tea Jitters

While fascinating, tea jitters are not always welcome or pleasurable. If you've ever found yourself feeling uncomfortable after tea, consider the following ways to reduce your chances of experiencing tea jitters:

Don't Drink Strong Tea on an Empty Stomach

A common thread that weaves its way through a large number of tea-related discomfort complaints is that the tea was consumed before eating. A small meal or snack beforehand can often make a significant difference.

Pay Attention to Brewing Strength

Few things impact a tea's *chaqi* and overall flavor than how it is brewed. As a general rule, using more leaf, longer steep times, or higher temperatures can increase extraction and create a more intense experience.

Explore Different Tea Types

Some Travelers discover that certain tea categories simply suit them better than others. If you are uncertain as to how to determine which tea is best for you, we highly encourage you to attend a [Traveling Tea Tavern](#) session. These monthly events, led by Tea Master Farrah, are a wonderful way to sample a wide variety of teas as well as meet other like minded tea explorers.

Slow Down

Tea has always rewarded patience, both in the brewing and in its enjoyment. Rather than rushing through multiple cups, or mindlessly sipping while engrossed in other tasks, consider taking time to mindfully notice how each infusion affects your body and mind.

Every Traveler's Journey Is Different

One of the most fascinating aspects of tea is that two people can share the exact same leaves from the same source, processed in the same way, and yet still have two entirely different experiences.

What one traveler calls tea jitters, another may describe as invigorating. What one person experiences as deep relaxation, another may barely notice

The next time a tea leaves you feeling energized, grounded, focused, or simply curious, consider that you may be experiencing more than caffeine alone.

You may be experiencing one of tea's oldest and most alluring mysteries.

Until next month, Travelers, may your cups be full and your journeys rewarding.

— The Tea Tavern

Sources

Ahmed, S., Unachukwu, U., Stepp, J. R., Peters, C. M., Long, C., & Kennelly, E. (2010). Pu-erh tea tasting in Yunnan, China: Correlation of drinkers' perceptions to phytochemistry. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, 132(1), 176–185.

Fu, Z., Chen, L., Zhou, S., Hong, Y., Zhang, X., & Chen, H. (2024). Analysis of differences in the accumulation of tea compounds under various processing techniques, geographical origins, and harvesting seasons. *Food Chemistry*, 430, 137000.

Hung, P.-Y. (2016). *Tea Production, Land Use Politics, and Ethnic Minorities: Struggling over Dilemmas in China's Southwest Frontier*. Springer.

Keenan, E. K., Finnie, M. D. A., Jones, P. S., Rogers, P. J., & Priestley, C. M. (2011). How much theanine in a cup of tea? Effects of tea type and method of preparation. *Food Chemistry*, 125(2), 588–594.

Ma, Z. (2023). Making "Senses": The qualia of Pu'er tea and sensorial encounters between tea producers and traders in southwest China. *Journal of Material Culture*, 28(1), 40–62.

Vuong, Q. V., Bowyer, M. C., & Roach, P. D. (2011). L-Theanine: Properties, synthesis and isolation from tea. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 91(11), 1931–1939.

Wang, S., Qiu, Y., Gan, R.-Y., & Zhu, F. (2022). Chemical constituents and biological properties of Pu-erh tea. *Food Research International*, 154, 110899.

Revision #1

Created 2026-06-15 23:20:43 UTC by christina.eichelkraut

Updated 2026-06-15 23:24:02 UTC by christina.eichelkraut