

July 2026 Newsletter

Why Tea Makes You Feel Different: Tea Jitters, L-Theanine, Chaqi, and the Science Behind Tea Energy

Quick Answer: Why Does Tea Cause Jitters or Feel Different Than Coffee?

Tea can create a wide range of sensations depending on the balance of caffeine, L-theanine, tea variety, brewing method, and a traditional tea concept known as chaqi.

Key Takeaways:

- Tea jitters can refer to either a caffeine reaction or a calming, focused sensation often described as "tea drunk."
- L-theanine, a naturally occurring amino acid in tea, may help promote relaxed alertness and can influence how caffeine feels.
- Different teas contain different ratios of caffeine and L-theanine, which is why two teas can produce very different experiences.
- Chaqi (茶气) is a traditional tea concept used to describe the perceived energy, character, or body feel of a tea.
- Sheng pu-erh, shu pu-erh, yancha, and dancong oolong are often associated with stronger tea energy experiences.
- Drinking strong tea on an empty stomach can increase the likelihood of unpleasant tea jitters.
- Brewing strength, tea origin, cultivation methods, and individual sensitivity all influence how tea affects the body and mind.
- Genetics may influence how quickly your body processes caffeine, which helps explain why some people experience tea jitters more easily than others.

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 among tea drinkers and are generally grouped under a single term: "jitters."

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

What, exactly, are "Tea Jitters"?

When most people 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 clarity, openness, warmth, heaviness, or even mild euphoria. Some call it being "tea drunk." Others refer to it as a buzz, a body feel, or simply a tea with strong energy.

Though these two experiences are often lumped together in discussion, they actually have very different 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 feelings are 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 suggests that L-theanine can mitigate some of the less desirable effects of caffeine.

The amount of L-theanine in tea varies with 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, another concept often emerges in conversation: chaqi (茶气).

Chaqi can be difficult to define because it describes personal experiences that vary from one individual to another.

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 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 can be 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-style teas.

For example, young sheng pu-erh is sometimes described as energetic, lively, or even "wiry." 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 whose chaqi stems largely from how they are processed.

Ancient Trees, Terrace Gardens, and Tea Energy

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

Teas harvested from ancient or old-growth tea trees, or trees over a century old, are commonly reported to have 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, accessing minerals and nutrients unavailable to younger plants, enabling them 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, in part, to 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 that pu-erh tea has measurable differences in chemical composition compared with 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. In contrast, 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.

Why Tea Affects Different People Differently

Even when two Travelers brew the exact same tea, their experiences may not be identical.

Part of the reason lies not in the teapot, but in the traveler themselves.

Modern research has found that genetics can influence how the body processes caffeine. Variations in certain genes affect the speed at which caffeine is metabolized, meaning some individuals naturally clear caffeine from their system more quickly than others.

For those who metabolize caffeine more slowly, the stimulating effects may linger longer and feel more intense. A tea that leaves one person feeling pleasantly alert may leave another feeling restless, overstimulated, or unable to sleep hours later.

Researchers have also identified genetic differences that may influence an individual's sensitivity to caffeine itself. In other words, two people may consume the same amount of caffeine, yet experience very different physical and mental responses.

This may help explain a mystery familiar to many tea drinkers: why one Traveler can happily enjoy multiple infusions of sheng pu-erh late into the evening while another carefully avoids tea after lunch.

Of course, genetics are only one piece of a much larger puzzle. Factors such as sleep quality, stress levels, food consumption, hydration, brewing methods, and overall caffeine intake all contribute to how tea affects the body.

Still, for Travelers who consistently experience stronger tea jitters than friends or family members, the answer may not be the tea at all. It may simply be that their body was written with a slightly different set of instructions.

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 more 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 suit them better than others. If you are uncertain about which tea is best for you, we highly encourage you to attend a [Traveling Tea Tavern](#) session. These monthly events, currently led by Tea Master Farrah, are a wonderful way to sample a wide variety of teas and 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

Frequently Asked Questions About Tea Jitters and Chaqi

Why does tea make me jittery?

Tea jitters are most commonly caused by caffeine, especially when tea is consumed on an empty stomach or in large quantities. However, some tea drinkers also use the term "jitters" to describe sensations such as heightened awareness, relaxation, warmth, or mild euphoria.

Why does tea feel different from coffee?

Tea contains both caffeine and L-theanine. While caffeine contributes to alertness, L-theanine is associated with a calmer state of focus. The combination can create a different experience than coffee for many drinkers.

What is L-theanine in tea?

L-theanine is a naturally occurring amino acid found in tea leaves. It contributes to tea's flavor profile and is often associated with relaxed alertness and mental clarity.

What is chaqi?

Chaqi (茶气) is a traditional tea term used to describe the perceived energy, character, or body feel of a tea. Depending on the individual, chaqi may be experienced as warmth, focus, relaxation, awareness, or other physical and mental sensations.

Can tea make you feel "tea drunk"?

Some tea drinkers report experiencing sensations often described as being "tea drunk," including calmness, clarity, heaviness, warmth, or mild euphoria. These experiences are commonly discussed in tea culture and are often associated with chaqi.

Which teas are most associated with strong chaqi?

Tea drinkers often associate sheng pu-erh, shu pu-erh, yancha (rock tea), and dancong oolong with more pronounced body sensations or tea energy experiences.

Why do some teas feel stronger than others?

Tea experiences can vary based on caffeine content, L-theanine levels, processing methods, age of the tea, brewing techniques, cultivation practices, and individual sensitivity.

How can I reduce unpleasant tea jitters?

Many tea drinkers find it helpful to avoid drinking strong tea on an empty stomach, adjust brewing strength, explore different tea varieties, and pay attention to how different teas affect their body and mind.

Does tea from ancient trees feel different?

Many tea enthusiasts report that teas harvested from ancient or old-growth tea trees produce a stronger body feel or more noticeable chaqi. Researchers have also identified chemical differences between teas grown in different environments, though individual experiences vary.

Why am I more sensitive to caffeine than other people?

Research suggests that genetic differences can affect both how quickly the body metabolizes caffeine and how strongly an individual responds to it. This means two people can drink the same tea and experience very different effects.

Are tea jitters genetic?

Yes. Variations in genes involved in caffeine metabolism and sensitivity may influence whether a person experiences tea jitters, prolonged alertness, restlessness, or other caffeine-related effects.

Why can some people drink tea before bed while others cannot?

Individual responses to caffeine vary. Genetics, overall caffeine sensitivity, sleep habits, stress levels, and the amount of tea consumed can all influence whether tea affects sleep.

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