

Detox: Generation Z and Their Infatuation with Flat Tummy Teas

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Abstract

This research is based on the correlation between flat tummy teas and detox products and the youth at a given time through the lens of history. Tea is the most commonly consumed beverage in the world besides water. With the promises I have witnessed myself in social media ads, I was very interested to see if there was any merit to the magic teas that shrink stomachs in days. I hope to clear some of the confusion that has been associated with these teas and hopefully allow more people who are interested in making that purchase to understand the historical background of this trend in the beauty industry.

Flat tummy teas and other beverages claiming to have detoxing qualities often present themselves as magical elixirs gracefully falling in your hands from the goddesses that call themselves influencers selling you on one promise. One needs this to look like me. As many teenage girls transfer to the realm of adult women, a spotlight is shown on them and along with that light comes expectations. To be thin but not *too* thin. To maintain a flat stomach yet a curved waist. And the magical source that claims to hold all of its user's dreams is a tea leaf. Flat tummy teas and other detox products have been avidly marketed to Generation Z through the popularity of cross branding and the social media advertising bordering the lines of predation. While catering to a younger eye is apparent in hip font usage, bright colored packaging and regrettably clever naming conventions, (case in point, Bootea *refer to figure 1*) make no mistake, tea has been used as detox extensively throughout human history. With such a storied past, there is only one question that must be answered to determine if flat tummy teas are the almighty potion they claim to be: Does it work? Let us really get behind the "secret to weight loss that has been hidden for ages."

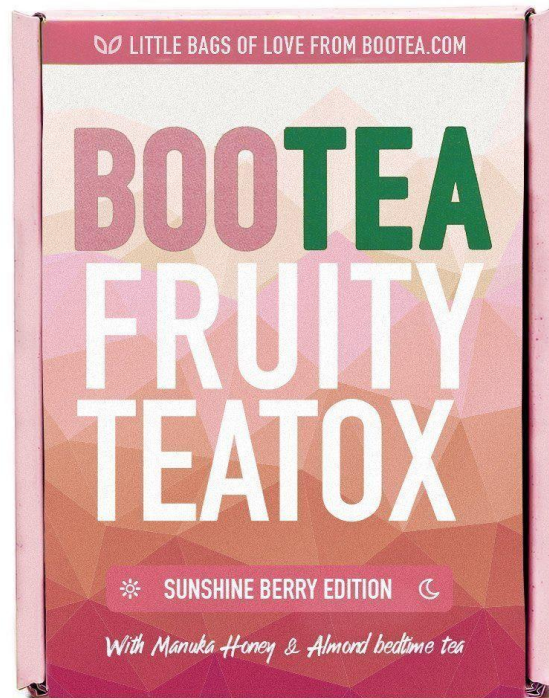


Figure 1. Bootea box design is marketed as a trendy item. *Bootea.com*

In order to understand the history of tea as a detox, it is important for us to understand the history of tea as a whole. As the legend goes, Chinese emperor Shen Nong had stumbled upon tea after demanding all of his subordinates to boil water before consumption in order to secure themselves from foodborne illness around 2700 BC. One day while boiling water tea leaves had fallen into the pot, crafting a phenomenal beverage by pure chance (Saber, 2010). Upon consumption, Shen claimed to have felt “invigorated” claiming “Tea gives vigo(u)r to the body, content to the mind, and determination of purpose” (Saber, 2010) showing that the association between tea and body has existed since its inception. Originating in China, a country notorious for its domestic multilingual status has two different words for tea depending on what part of the

country you learn of it in. The beverage we know as tea stems from the Chinese amoy word “t’e” while the mandarin denomination “cha” is adopted by most of Asia either directly or through some form of evolution (think chai in India) (Sonnad, 2018). The rule of thumb is if tea was spread to a country through Dutch trade ships that traded from northern China then the root term for tea would be the amoy word, t’e. If the tea was traded by land then it was done so by southern china and the root word for their tea would stem from the mandarin word, cha (Sonnad, 2018). Tea has long since been a global powerhouse responsible for many global events such the Opium Wars between China and Great Britain and the infamous Boston Tea Party of American independence fame (Saber, 2010). For the most part, tea had been valued for its taste and status as a caffeine source that was not coffee. It would not be until around the 1930s that we would see our miracle drink be associated with some more form modifying benefits (Saber, 2010).

The 1930s represents a massive shift in the culture of Americans and its influence on the world. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* would debut in theaters and break ground as the first film to be exhibited with sound. (HistoryLink.org staff, 2000) The possibilities became endless. Sound brought on a completely new vigor to the movie industry and the path was paved for starlets like Loretta Young and Carole Lombard to take centerstage– the day and age of the celebrity had come to pass. The existence of celebrities brought with it rampant toxicity in the minds of young women. Before this point, they would only have the other women in their classes, family and neighborhoods to compare themselves to but now the competition has no tangibility and all of the allure. Celebrity culture and crowds that all these celebrities assembled taught women that their value is not within their character; I mean none of the masses who drooled and ogled at these women knew them. No, the emphasis was entirely on how they were able to captivate an audience with their body and a stare. How could the laywoman attain even a fraction of the

attention these celebrities attained? Well the answer is simply to transform oneself. Diet culture began to kick up in the 1930s and tea had become a consistent part of these dieting routines due to tea's appetite suppressing qualities in conjunction with its caffeinated variants serving as a diuretic and a pseudo laxative (Saber, 2010). In the chase of a fantasy, a new scary trend would begin to take place in modern America.

On average, 9% or 28.8 million Americans experience an eating disorder at some point in their life. This number may seem relatively small but is made even more concerning due to the fact that eating disorders have been categorized as the second deadliest mental health condition, second only to opioid addiction (ANAD, 2023). Some other concerning statistics include (ANAD, 2023):

- 42% of first-third graders desire to be thinner.
- 81% of 10 year olds fear being overweight
- 46% of 9-11 year olds participate in some form of dieting.
- 35-57% of female adolescents admit to some form of fasting, crash dieting, use of dieting supplements or self induced vomiting

All in the chase of an ideal that was never meant for them despite them being paired up against these women years ahead of them in age and experience. The sale of flat belly teas has become such a success because there is a market. Global research estimates that detox products will become a 75 billion dollar industry by 2026 (Rosenbloom, 2022) What makes all of this information worse is the fact that detox products have been proven to be a scam. Detoxes claim to rid your body of fat and toxins but the toxins in specific are never defined. The issue with detoxes and flat belly tea is that any of the supposed benefits they offer simply stem from the fact that their regimens are low calorie drinks supplemented with instructions to watch what one eats

and heavy amounts of laxatives. (Rosenbloom, 2022) The amount of laxative properties included in these beverages can also have disastrous effects as laxatives loosen your bowels accidents are prone to happen especially after repeated use. The inclusion of ingredients like senna and other herbs can also lead to serious issues that can lead to liver failure and death as well. (Kesaverapu, Kang, Shin and Rothstein, 2017)

As I begin to close out, I would like to provide a personal anecdotal. I myself have struggled with my weight for quite awhile. A mixture of poor dieting and tug-of-war eating habits has landed me in a somewhat unhealthy relationship with food. I would like to say I have never had a full blown eating disorder but I definitely trot the line. While writing this paper I thought that it would be very interesting to sit down and interview my girlfriend about her relationship with eating. She has given me her okay to share this information and is eager to assist by providing some responses based on her experience. Lorena first began considering her weight at the age of 9. Her main source of her concerns stemmed from ballet classes that she had taken at the time. Her dance instructor would say things like “I know it's halloween enjoy yourselves but not too much. Make sure you don't eat too much candy and back up the candy you do eat with vegetables.” She would go on to detail conversations her dance instructor had with her and the rest of her class about portion control. Lorena absorbed these lessons but claims she did not truly take action until she was 13. Her parents had picked up a health kick and replaced all food items in the house for low calorie, sugar free or Atkins counterparts. At the age of 13 years old, Lorena would ask her mother to purchase FitTea to which her mother obliged. FitTea essentially operated as a laxative causing frequent trips to the bathroom. At this time lorena and her sister, 2 years her senior, would begin to don waist trainers. At the age of 15, Lorena would begin to restrict her consumption severely. By the age of 16, she would develop anorexia. This

continued until Lorena had fainted at the ACL music festival. Attempting to rebound from her anorexia, her restricting habits flipped to indulgence and she developed a habit of binge eating. But how could this have been avoided? I mean, Lorena first began thinking about her weight at the age of 9.

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The Jazz Singer, first successful feature film with sound, debuts in Seattle at the Blue

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Appendix

Figure 1. Bootea box design is marketed as a trendy item. *Bootea.com*