

Why wine and tea pair so well with a meal: It's all in the mouthfeel

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Of course a nice glass of wine goes well with a hearty steak, and now researchers who study the way food feels in our mouths think they may understand why that is: The astringent wine and fatty meat are like the yin and yang of the food world, sitting on opposite ends of a sensory spectrum.

The findings, reported in the October 9th issue of [Current Biology](#), offer a whole new definition of the balanced meal. They also offer a new way of thinking about our eating habits, both good and bad.

"The mouth is a magnificently sensitive somatosensory organ, arguably the most sensitive in the body," said Paul Breslin of Rutgers University and the Monell Chemical Senses Center. "The way foods make our mouths feel has a great deal to do with what foods we choose to eat."

It might explain the appeal of [salad dressings](#), with their characteristic acids and oils, for example. Think also of the pink folds of ginger on the sides of our sushi plates or the soda with our burgers and fries.

The researchers knew that astringent wines feel rough and dry in our mouths. Fats, on the other hand, are slippery. There was the notion that the two might oppose each other, but it wasn't quite clear how that might really work. After all, the astringents we consume are only weakly astringent.

Breslin, Catherine Peyrot des Gachons, and colleagues now show that

weakly astringent brews—in this case containing grape seed extract, a green tea ingredient, and aluminum sulfate—build in perceived astringency with repeated sipping. When paired with dried meat, those astringent beverages indeed counter the slippery sensation that goes with fattiness.

This natural tendency for seeking balance in our mouths might have benefits for maintaining a diversity of foods in our diet, Breslin says.

"The opposition between fatty and astringent sensations allows us to eat [fatty foods](#) more easily if we also ingest astringents with them," he says.

As an aside, Breslin adds, fresh seeds and nuts could have a certain sort of appeal. "These foods come both with their own fats and astringents in one package, so they may be self-balancing."

More information: Peyrot des Gachons et al.: "Opponency of astringent and fat sensations." [DOI: 10.1016/j.cub.2012.08.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2012.08.017)

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