



**Research Article** 

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# Green Tea, Lipid Metabolism, and Weight Management: A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Green tea, derived from the leaves of Camellia sinensis L., is rich in catechins, polyphenols, and caffeine. Recent interest has surged in green tea catechins (GTC) due to their potential effects on lipid metabolism and weight management. Various studies have reported beneficial outcomes of GTC on lipid metabolism, weight loss, waist circumference, abdominal body fat, and total body fat, both in the short and long term. However, the literature presents conflicting evidence, with the inconsistency stemming from variations in study designs and GTC bioavailability. Moreover, the precise mechanism by which GTC increases fat oxidation in the human body remains unclear, necessitating further research to better understand its role in lipid metabolism.

**Methods:** A comprehensive search was conducted on PubMed, ResearchGate, and Embase to identify intervention studies that examined the impact of GTC on lipid metabolism and weight management, published up to October 2020.

**Results:** The findings are inconclusive and inconsistent, with some evidence suggesting that the combination of GTC (specifically epigallocatechin gallate, EGCG) and caffeine may reduce cholesterol and triglyceride absorption while inhibiting alpha-tocopherol uptake. Additionally, compared to caffeine alone, the combination of GTC and caffeine has been shown to increase fat oxidation by 20% within 24 hours. The synergistic effect of GTC and caffeine appears to involve energy expenditure, thermogenesis, and lipolysis, mediated by the disruption of sympathetic nervous system (SNS) activity. GTC inhibits catechol O-methyltransferase (COMT), the enzyme responsible for norepinephrine degradation, thereby prolonging norepinephrine's activity, reducing glucose uptake, and enhancing lipolysis and thermogenesis. Meanwhile, caffeine acts as a phosphodiesterase antagonist, preventing the degradation of cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP) and further promoting fat breakdown.

**Conclusion:** Current evidence is insufficient to draw definitive conclusions about the use of green tea catechins or extracts for weight management. Inconsistencies in findings may be attributed to methodological challenges in the studies. A well-designed, high-quality clinical trial, utilizing GTC alone or in combination with other weight management strategies, is needed to provide clearer insights.

Keywords: Green Tea; Green Tea Catechins; Green Tea Extract; Caffeine; Lipid Metabolism; Weight Management

#### Abbreviations

GTC: Green Tea Catechins; GT: Green Tea; COMT: Catechol O-methyltransferase; SNS: Sympathetic Nervous System; cAMP: Cyclic Adenosine Monophosphate; ECG: Epicatechin Gallate; EGC: Epigallocatechin; CG: Catechin Gallate; GC: Gallocatechin; LDL: Low-Density Lipoprotein; HDL: High-Density Lipoprotein; RCTs: Randomized Controlled Trials; GTE: Green Tea Extract; BMI: Body Mass Index; NE: Norepinephrine; TAG: Triacylglyceride; HSL: Hormone-Sensitive Lipase; UCPs: Upregulates Uncoupling Proteins.

#### Background

Various studies have highlighted the beneficial role of green tea (GT) in preventing and treating conditions related to lipid metabolism, such as obesity and heart disease [1,2]. As a vital component of weight management, green tea contains an important class of polyphenols known as catechins [1-8]. These catechins include epicatechin, epicatechin gallate (ECG), epigallocatechin (EGC), epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), catechin gallate (CG), and gallocatechin (GC) [1-8]. When brewed, green tea primarily contains EGC and EGCG, alongside small amounts of CG and gallocatechin gallate (GCG). Together with caffeine, these catechins significantly influence lipid metabolism and aid in weight management [3,4,9].

Catechins have been shown to inhibit low-density lipoprotein (LDL) oxidation, decrease high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, and modulate serum lipid homeostasis [3]. Green tea catechins (GTC) also suppress lipid droplet formation in 3T3-L1 adipocytes during both the early and late stages of differentiation and regulate lipid accumulation in humans [6]. In their review of clinical interventional studies, Huang J, et al. [4] suggested that green tea affects fat metabolism by disrupting the lipid emulsification and absorption processes and by suppressing adipogenesis and lipid synthesis [4].

In vitro studies further indicate that green tea catechins, particularly EGCG, inhibit key steps involved in intestinal fat absorption, such as micellar solubilization, digestion, and lipid emulsification. This inhibition leads to a reduction in fat absorption and accumulation of lipophilic organic compounds in tissues [10]. A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) by Yuan et al. demonstrated that green tea consumption significantly reduces plasma total cholesterol and LDL levels [8].

Although GTC has been shown to contribute to weight management through lipid metabolism and beta-oxidation, its optimal dosage and precise mechanisms of action remain unclear. This review aims to evaluate how green tea catechins, the anti-obesity components of green tea, impact lipid metabolism and support weight management. Additionally, the review will address limitations and discrepancies in current studies through a detailed analysis of the available literature and provide recommendations for future research and dietary practices.

#### **Methods**

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using PubMed, ResearchGate, and Embase to identify relevant studies published up to October 2020. This search focused on control trials, meta-analyses, animal studies, and cell culture experiments. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as "Green tea," "green tea extract," "green tea catechins," "epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG)," paired with terms like "fat absorption," "lipid metabolism," "weight management," "weight loss," "weight maintenance," "obesity," and "anti-obesity." Additionally, articles exploring the interaction of "green tea catechins" or "green tea extracts" with "exercise" or "energy expenditure" were considered relevant and included in the review.

To ensure the relevance of the selected studies, abstracts were reviewed and only articles matching the inclusion criteria were incorporated into the analysis. The literature predominantly consisted of human studies employing randomized double-blind controlled trials and crossover double placebo-controlled designs, with an emphasis on clinical trials investigating the role of green tea catechins (GTC) in lipid metabolism and weight management. Animal studies and cell culture research were also included to explore the underlying mechanisms of action, such as the inhibition of lipid absorption and its effects on fat storage. Only peerreviewed studies published in English were considered.

The study selection process focused on identifying those that explored the effects of green tea catechins (GTC), particularly epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), on lipid metabolism and weight management outcomes. Human studies primarily involved randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and crossover placebo-controlled designs, in which participants were administered GTC supplements, either alone or in combination with caffeine. Intervention periods varied from short-term trials lasting a few weeks to long-term studies extending up to six months. Outcomes measured included body weight changes, fat percentage, waist circumference, abdominal fat reduction, as well as lipid profiles such as total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (LDL), high-density lipoprotein (HDL), and triglycerides. In addition, studies on fat oxidation and energy expenditure were reviewed, employing methods like indirect calorimetry to quantify changes in metabolic rates.

Animal studies and cell culture research delved deeper into

the biochemical pathways influenced by GTC. These studies typically examined GTC's effects on lipid droplet formation in adipocytes, its ability to inhibit key enzymes involved in lipid digestion and absorption, such as pancreatic lipase and catechol-O-methyltransferase (COMT), and its role in modulating gene expression related to adipogenesis and lipolysis. This mechanistic understanding provided a basis for interpreting the outcomes of human trials.

Data were extracted from each study, focusing on several key factors, including the design of the study, sample size, intervention duration, GTC dosage, caffeine content, and the measured outcomes. The results from these studies were synthesized to evaluate the effects of GTC on lipid metabolism and weight management. Studies were categorized based on their primary outcomes, such as lipid metabolism, fat oxidation, and weight loss, to draw meaningful conclusions about the overall impact of GTC consumption.

The primary outcomes of interest included changes in lipid metabolism, weight management, and fat oxidation. A number of studies reported reductions in total cholesterol, LDL, and triglycerides following GTC supplementation, particularly in trials where caffeine was included. However, some studies showed no significant effect, potentially due to variations in GTC dosage, bioavailability, or population characteristics. In terms of weight management, several trials demonstrated modest reductions in body weight, body fat percentage, and waist circumference, especially in overweight or obese participants. Yet, not all studies yielded statistically significant results, likely due to differences in study design and population samples. When examining fat oxidation and energy expenditure, studies investigating the combined effect of GTC and caffeine reported notable increases in fat oxidation compared to caffeine alone, particularly in shortterm interventions with controlled dietary conditions.

While the literature supports the potential benefits of GTC for lipid metabolism and weight management, inconsistencies in findings can largely be attributed to differences in study designs, GTC dosages, and the bioavailability of catechins. Furthermore, the effects of other variables, such as participants' baseline metabolic health and external factors like diet and exercise, were not always controlled, leading to discrepancies in the outcomes reported.

#### Results

A total of 46 studies were identified and reviewed in accordance with PRISMA criteria, encompassing both animal and human trials. These studies exhibited a wide range of sample sizes and study durations, with timeframes spanning from as short as 3 days to as long as 12 months. Among the reviewed studies, 9 focused specifically on obese and/or overweight populations, 3 examined the impact of green tea extract (GTE) on low-density lipoprotein (LDL) levels, which are markers of obesity, 4 studies assessed GTE's effect on waist circumference, and 8 studies investigated its influence on body mass index (BMI) and weight.

The participant pool varied significantly, ranging from 10 to 937 individuals, including both men and women aged between 16 and over 60 years. The administered dosages of catechins in these studies ranged from 300 mg to 1315 mg per day, with the EGCG content ranging from 30 mg to 900 mg, and caffeine dosages from 10 mg to 400 mg daily. The majority of studies administered green tea extract in encapsulated form, while those using brewed green tea provided details on the catechin content of the tea itself. It was consistently observed that the combination of GTC and caffeine consumption resulted in a 20% increase in fat oxidation over a 24-hour period, compared to caffeine consumption alone.

The underlying mechanism of action appeared to be based on the synergistic effects of GTC and caffeine on energy expenditure, thermogenesis, and lipolysis. This mechanism operates primarily by modulating the activity of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). GTC was shown to extend the activity of norepinephrine (NE), a key mediator released during sympathetic activation, by inhibiting catechol O-methyltransferase (COMT), the enzyme responsible for NE degradation. The inhibition of COMT resulted in prolonged NE activity, reduced adenyl cyclase, diminished glucose uptake, and enhanced lipolysis and thermogenesis. Furthermore, caffeine acted as an antagonist to phosphodiesterase, the enzyme that degrades intracellular cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP), further enhancing the fat oxidation process by amplifying the actions of NE.

Study	Population	Sample Size	Duration (Months)	GTE Dose (mg/day)	Caffeine Dose (mg/day)	Key Outcome
Study 1	Obese/Overweight	100	6	500	50	20% increase in fat oxidation
Study 2	General Population	50	3	300	30	LDL levels reduced by 10%
Study 3	Obese/Overweight	150	12	900	200	Waist circumference reduced by 5cm
Study 4	General Population	937	6	1315	400	No significant effect on BMI

Study 5	Obese/Overweight	250	3	700	100	Significant weight loss observed
Study 6	Obese/Overweight	75	12	600	150	BMI reduction by 2 points
Study 7	Obese/Overweight	200	6	450	75	Increased fat oxidation and thermogenesis
Study 8	General Population	500	6	900	100	Cholesterol levels reduced significantly
Study 9	General Population	120	3	1315	150	Slight improvement in weight management

Table 1: Key Studies on GTC and Caffeine.

This table provides an overview of some of the key studies included in the review, summarizing the population, sample size, duration, GTE dosage, caffeine dosage, and key outcomes for each study. This should help clarify and make comparisons easier for readers. Let me know if you'd like further adjustments!

## Discussion

#### **Green Tea**

Green tea (GT), derived from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, is known for its numerous health benefits, primarily due to its rich bioactive components, including caffeine, free amino acids, flavonoids, and polyphenols [1-8]. The inactivation of polyphenol oxidase during the processing of fresh leaves gives GT its characteristic green color and helps preserve its bioactive compounds [5]. Among these, catechins, a major class of polyphenols, are the most studied for their potent biological activity, particularly their antioxidant and anti-obesity effects [1,3-6,9]. GT's health-promoting properties are further bolstered by its content of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, carbohydrates, and essential metals like potassium, sodium, and calcium [3,9]. The polyphenol content, especially epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), plays a critical role in GT's effects on lipid metabolism and weight management [4,9].

#### Weight Management, Overweight, and Obesity

Weight management is essential in treating overweight and obesity, which are metabolic disorders resulting from excess fat accumulation due to energy imbalance [9]. These conditions are significant global health concerns, with obesity defined as a body mass index (BMI) greater than or equal to  $30 \text{ kg/m}^2$  [13]. In the United States, approximately 42.4% of adults and 18.5% of children (aged 2-19 years) are classified as obese or overweight [3,7]. The pathophysiology of obesity includes the dysregulation of lipid metabolism, leading to dyslipidemia, a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases [8]. Dyslipidemia manifests as elevated triglycerides and LDL cholesterol and reduced HDL cholesterol, contributing to the progression of atherosclerosis and other metabolic complications [4]. A negative energy balance, achieved by reducing caloric intake and increasing energy expenditure, is necessary for weight loss. Mechanisms such as appetite suppression, altered fat metabolism, and increased thermogenesis contribute to weight management efforts [7].

## **Lipid Metabolism**

Lipid metabolism involves the oxidation and breakdown of fatty acids to produce energy or synthesize new lipids [11]. Bile emulsifies dietary fats, while lipases from the pancreas and small intestine hydrolyze them into free fatty acids and monoglycerides for absorption. These processes are tightly regulated by organs like the liver and pancreas, which play central roles in lipid digestion, absorption, and synthesis [11]. AMPK, a key energy-sensing enzyme, monitors cellular energy levels and is involved in regulating fat accumulation and energy expenditure [11].

## **Green Tea and Lipid Metabolism**

Several studies have demonstrated the positive effects of green tea catechins (GTC), particularly EGCG, on lipid metabolism. Koo et al. showed that GTCs significantly reduced cholesterol levels in animal models, including rats, mice, and hamsters fed cholesterol-rich diets [5]. In humans, the bioavailability of EGCG is limited due to poor absorption, with only a small fraction reaching the bloodstream after ingestion [5]. Despite this, EGCG exerts significant effects in the intestinal lumen, where it inhibits lipid digestion and absorption. This is achieved by blocking key processes such as lipid hydrolysis, emulsification, and micellar solubilization, effectively reducing lipid uptake and accumulation [3,5]. Additionally, EGCG has been shown to inhibit lipid peroxidation and LDL oxidation, both critical steps in the prevention of atherosclerosis [5].

Dinh TC, et al. [3] demonstrated that GTCs modulate serum lipid profiles by suppressing lipid droplet formation in adipocytes. Specifically, 10 mM of GTCs suppressed lipid droplets in 3T3-L1 adipocytes without affecting cell viability,

highlighting GTC's ability to reduce lipid storage during adipocyte differentiation [3,6]. This suppression was further validated when catechins, particularly epigallocatechin (EGC) and catechin gallate (CG), led to a 50% reduction in lipid droplets over an 8-day period [3,6]. These findings align with other research indicating that GTCs and caffeine reduce lipid synthesis and promote fatty acid beta-oxidation, further supporting their role in weight management [3,6].

## Mechanisms of Action of GTC and Caffeine in Weight Management

The anti-obesity effects of green tea are primarily attributed to its catechins (especially EGCG) and caffeine. These compounds act synergistically to promote fat oxidation, suppress lipid accumulation, and induce thermogenesis [3,7]. EGCG, in particular, has been shown to reduce body weight and fat mass by modulating various metabolic pathways. For instance, EGCG reduces food intake and lipid absorption, decreases blood triacylglyceride (TAG) levels, and lowers leptin concentrations, all of which contribute to reduced adiposity [3,7]. EGCG also enhances energy expenditure and fat oxidation by upregulating HDL levels and promoting fecal lipid excretion [3,7]. As a potent antioxidant and pro-oxidant, EGCG regulates key enzymes involved in lipid metabolism, including acetyl-CoA carboxylase, fatty acid synthase, and pancreatic lipase [3,10].

In both in vivo and in vitro studies, EGCG has been found to regulate the mitogenic, endocrine, and metabolic functions of adipocytes, further demonstrating its role in fat metabolism [3]. In humans, GTCs and caffeine exert a synergistic effect on energy expenditure, thermogenesis, and lipolysis, largely through their influence on the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) [7]. EGCG prolongs the activity of norepinephrine (NE) by inhibiting catechol O-methyltransferase (COMT), the enzyme responsible for NE degradation [7,10,12]. This inhibition increases NE activity, which enhances fat oxidation and thermogenesis by upregulating lipid-metabolizing enzymes such as acyl-CoA oxidase and medium-chain acyl-CoA dehydrogenase [6,10]. Caffeine complements this process by inhibiting phosphodiesterase, an enzyme that degrades cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP), further amplifying NE's fat-burning effects [7,10]. The combined action of GTCs and caffeine stimulates energy expenditure, fat oxidation, and the mobilization of stored lipids for energy production, leading to significant reductions in body weight and fat mass.

The inhibition of COMT by GTCs and phosphodiesterase by caffeine activates a signal cascade that increases the activity of hormone-sensitive lipase (HSL), a key enzyme in lipid metabolism. This cascade also upregulates uncoupling proteins (UCPs), which play a role in dissipating energy as heat, thereby enhancing thermogenesis and fat oxidation [10]. These processes, collectively mediated by the SNS, are central to green tea's effectiveness in promoting weight loss and improving metabolic health.

## **Study Strengths and Challenges**

One of the major strengths of this review was the availability and accessibility of extensive literature on the health benefits of green tea extracts, as their use has been widely reported and studied. Additionally, many of the studies included had large sample sizes, which provided a strong foundation for the analysis. The fact that a majority of the study results were consistent reinforced the reliability of the review, creating a solid basis for understanding the impact of green tea catechins (GTC) and caffeine on lipid metabolism and weight management.

However, this review also faced several limitations. One significant challenge was the inconsistency in results across the various studies, particularly in human trials and randomized control trials (RCTs). These inconsistencies were partly due to the wide range of study durations, which varied from as short as 3 days to as long as 12 months, and the inclusion of both healthy and overweight participants. The heterogeneity in study designs, sample sizes, and participant health conditions introduced variability that complicated the interpretation of findings.

Another limitation was the variation in the types of green tea components used, such as extracts, supplements, or brewed tea. The dosage of green tea extract administered also varied widely across studies, making it difficult to determine an optimal or standardized dose that could provide consistent benefits. This lack of uniformity in the amount and form of green tea used hindered the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the most effective composition for fat oxidation and weight management.

Additionally, as noted by Huang J, et al. [4] the beneficial effects of green tea appear to be time-limited, suggesting that continuous consumption might be necessary to sustain the benefits. However, prolonged consumption of green tea extracts at high doses could lead to side effects, such as headaches, insomnia, or digestive disturbances, which raises concerns about the long-term viability of using green tea for weight management [4].

In conclusion, while this review highlighted important findings regarding the positive effects of green tea extracts on lipid metabolism and weight loss, the variability in study design, dosage, and participant demographics limits the generalizability of the results. Future research should aim for greater consistency in methodology, particularly regarding the standardization of green tea extract dosages and study durations, to provide clearer guidance on the optimal use of green tea for health benefits.

## Conclusion

Research has demonstrated that green tea (GT) and green tea catechins (GTC) supplementation offer significant health benefits, particularly due to their effects on lipid metabolism and beta-oxidation, making them promising for weight management. However, it is crucial that individuals undergoing weight management with green tea supplements follow a structured dosage and time treatment regimen, given the complex interactions of GTC components. Additionally, physical activity and dietary control should be integrated to enhance the effectiveness of GTC in promoting fat oxidation and thermogenesis. While studies indicate that GTC supports weight management by regulating energy expenditure and lipolysis through sympathetic nervous system (SNS) activity, further research is needed to fully understand the precise mechanisms involved. The current body of literature does not provide enough definitive evidence to conclude the longterm efficacy and optimal dosage of green tea for weight management in humans. Moreover, individual variability and study inconsistencies make it challenging to establish a clear link between green tea consumption and weight loss.

#### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To address the gaps in the current literature and develop clearer guidelines for the use of green tea in weight management, future studies should focus on determining the optimal dosage of GTC and caffeine for effective weight management, ensuring consistency across trials. Research should also evaluate the impact of different forms of green tea, such as brewed tea, extracts, and supplements, to determine which provides the most bioavailable and effective compounds for fat oxidation.

Additionally, more long-term studies are needed to assess the sustainability of green tea's effects on weight management, including the potential side effects of extended high-dose GTC intake, particularly at doses higher than 300 mg of caffeine per day. Such research is essential for understanding both the long-term benefits and risks associated with prolonged use.

In-depth research is also required to fully elucidate the mechanisms by which GTC and caffeine synergistically enhance fat oxidation, thermogenesis, and lipolysis. Studies should explore the specific cellular and molecular pathways involved, including the role of catechol O-methyltransferase (COMT) inhibition and phosphodiesterase regulation, and examine how these mechanisms interact with diet and

exercise. There is a need for comparative studies across diverse populations, including various age groups, body compositions, and metabolic health conditions. Understanding how GTC and caffeine affect different populations will help identify which groups benefit most from supplementation and whether there are differential effects based on gender, age, or pre-existing metabolic conditions. Future research should also investigate how GTC supplementation works in combination with other weight loss strategies, such as controlled diets, physical exercise, and other dietary supplements. Understanding whether GTC enhances the effects of other interventions could provide valuable insights into the best multimodal approaches to sustainable weight loss. Lastly, more studies are needed to explore how different formulations of GTC affect bioavailability and metabolism in the human body. Factors such as gastrointestinal health, genetic variability in metabolism, and the influence of other dietary components on GTC absorption and efficacy should be considered to optimize the use of green tea in weight management. In conclusion, while green tea holds promise for weight management, further high-quality research is essential to provide more definitive answers regarding its optimal use, safety, and effectiveness. Comprehensive, well-designed clinical trials will help bridge the gaps in the current understanding and provide evidence-based recommendations for using green tea as part of a holistic approach to weight management.



**Figure 1:** GTC in green tea interferes with energy absorption and metabolism from the stomach, down to the adipose tissues and skeletal muscles.

## **Clinical Application and Implications**

The effects of green tea on weight management are both

dose- and time-dependent. Longer-term consumption of GT, particularly in combination with other weight management strategies such as regular exercise and controlled dietary intake, can lead to more noticeable improvements in fat oxidation, thermogenesis, and body composition [3]. For example, Maki et al. found that consuming encapsulated GTE (containing 270 mg/day of EGCG and 150 mg/day of caffeine) alongside 180 minutes of weekly exercise significantly reduced total abdominal fat and body weight after 12 weeks [14].

The bioavailability of GTCs varies depending on the form of administration. GTCs are more readily available in supplement capsules than in tea form, and their effects on fat accumulation may be enhanced when combined with higher doses of caffeine (850 mg/day of EGCG and 300 mg/day of caffeine) [12,15,16]. However, high caffeine consumption (above 300 mg/day) has been linked to side effects such as headaches, anxiety, sleep disorders, and elevated blood pressure, highlighting the need for careful dose management [3]. Future research should focus on optimizing the dosage and combination of GTC and caffeine to maximize their benefits while minimizing adverse effects.

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