

The great milk debate – before or after the tea?

<https://goenglish.fr/fr/blog/post/60-the-great-milk-debate-before-or-after-the-tea.html>

There is nothing more British than a cup of tea (or a ‘cuppa’, as it is sometimes called). Many Brits take their tea with milk. The milk helps balance the tannins in the tea and makes it more mellow. I’ve always had one question: does one put the milk in the teacup before or after the tea? I only knew one British person, which is not a representation of the entire population. How would I find the answer? As luck would have it, I was going to Bristol, England. I decided that this would be the perfect opportunity to get the answers I’ve been looking for.

The first day, we ate in the restaurant at the hotel. The staff were evenly divided between before and after. I was not put off and vowed to continue the following day in Wales. When we arrived in Wales, I asked the hotel staff about their tea preference. I received the same answer. I was disappointed but more curious than ever.

The third day, a chemist (not a pharmacist*, but a chemistry professor) told me that when milk and tea are combined, there is an actual chemical change. The change occurs whether the tea goes in first or not. This did not help me on my quest, it only added to the confusion! The last day, I asked several more people. At this point, there was still no clear answer.

When we checked out of our hotel, I made one last effort and asked at the front desk — milk, before or after the tea? I would finally get the answer to my years-old question. He told me, “You can do it however you like.” I was disappointed. It reminded me of the French response to many, many questions: ‘*Ça dépend*’.

I was ready to leave England, defeated by... tea. But then the clerk went on to say, “I guess you could say that as a good rule of thumb, if you brew the tea in a pot, pour milk into your cup before the tea. If you are using a teabag, put the milk in after.” YES! I finally found the answer I was seeking. I have many other questions about the British tea obsession and hope to do more exploration on the subject.

*pharmacist (US)/chemist (UK)

actual = *(ici) un vrai*

as luck would have it = *par chance*

at this point = *à ce stade*

chemist = *un chimiste*

clerk = *la réceptionniste*

defeated = *(ici) battu*

disappointed = *déçu*

evenly divided = *équitablement divisés*

front desk = *la réception*

however you like = *comme vous voulez*

mellow = *(ici) doux*

more than ever = *plus que jamais*

moreover = *de plus*

several = *plusieurs*

since = *puisque*

teabag = *un sachet de thé*

teacup = *une tasse*

(tea)pot = *une théière*

the following day = *le lendemain*

to balance = *équilibrer*

to be put off = *(ici) décourager*

to brew (tea) = *(ici) faire, préparer*

to check out (of a hotel) = *libérer sa chambre*

to depend on = *(ici) selon*

to look for = *chercher*

to occur = *se passer*

to pour = *verser*

to seek = *(ici) chercher (l'information)*

to vow = *avouer*

Wales = *le Pays de Galles*