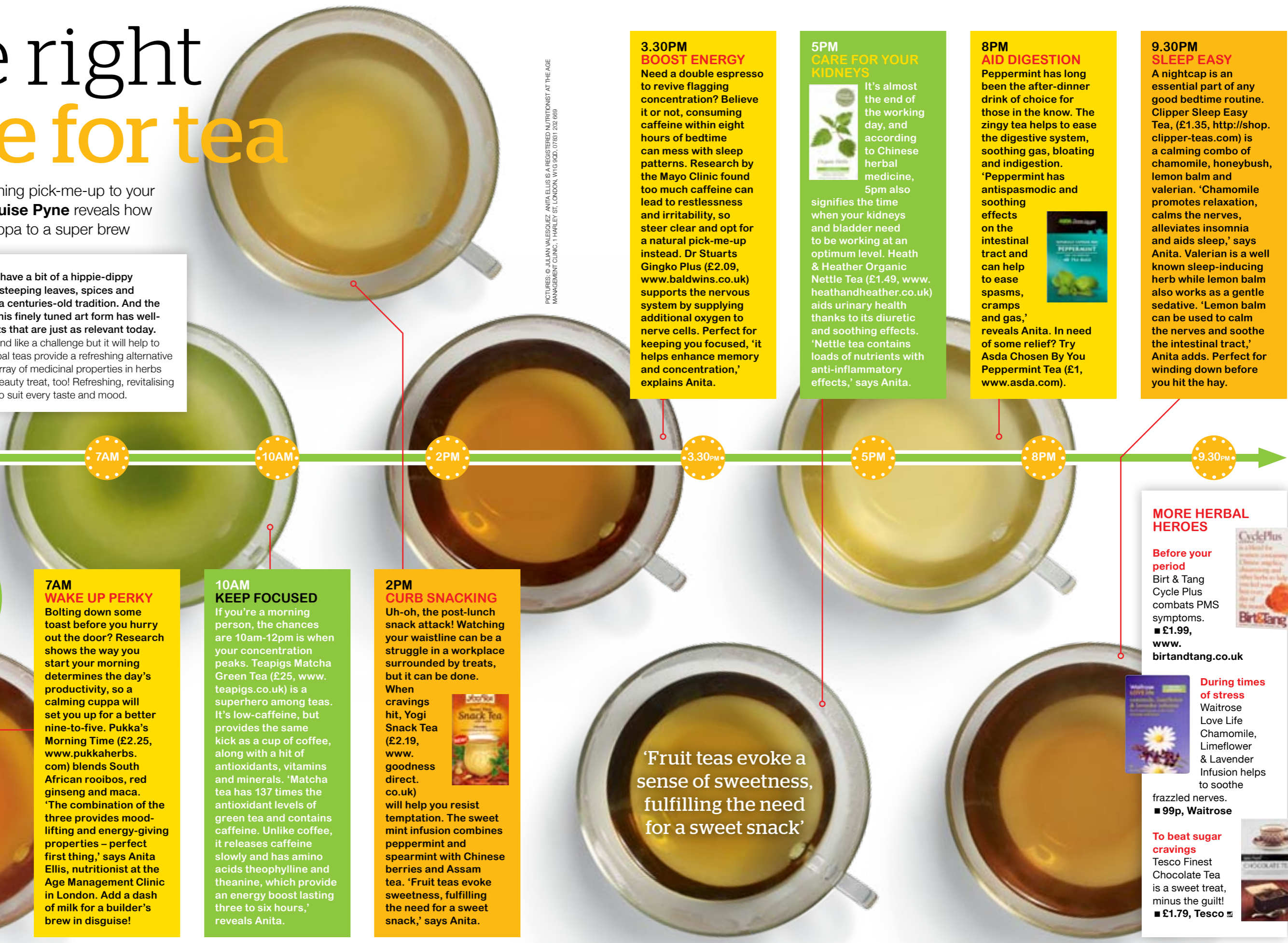


The right time for tea

From your early morning pick-me-up to your bedtime soother, **Louise Pyne** reveals how to upgrade every cuppa to a super brew

Herbal tea might have a bit of a hippie-dippy reputation, but steeping leaves, spices and fruit in water is a centuries-old tradition. And the good news is, this finely tuned art form has well-established health benefits that are just as relevant today. Avoiding caffeine may sound like a challenge but it will help to hydrate your body, and herbal teas provide a refreshing alternative to plain old H₂O. Plus, the array of medicinal properties in herbs acts as a health aid and a beauty treat, too! Refreshing, revitalising or calming... There's a tea to suit every taste and mood.

PICTURES: © JULIAN VALESQUEZ ANITA ELLIS IS A REGISTERED NUTRITIONIST AT THE AGE MANAGEMENT CLINIC, 1 HARLEY ST, LONDON, W1G 9DD, 07881 202 669



YOUR TEA TIMELINE
Whether you want to zone out or add some zing to your day, follow our guide to the perfect blends to supercharge your wellbeing from morning to night.

7AM WAKE UP PERKY
Bolting down some toast before you hurry out the door? Research shows the way you start your morning determines the day's productivity, so a calming cuppa will set you up for a better nine-to-five. Pukka's Morning Time (£2.25, www.pukkaherbs.com) blends South African rooibos, red ginseng and maca. 'The combination of the three provides mood-lifting and energy-giving properties – perfect first thing,' says Anita Ellis, nutritionist at the Age Management Clinic in London. Add a dash of milk for a builder's brew in disguise!

10AM KEEP FOCUSED
If you're a morning person, the chances are 10am-12pm is when your concentration peaks. Teapigs Matcha Green Tea (£25, www.teapigs.co.uk) is a superhero among teas. It's low-caffeine, but provides the same kick as a cup of coffee, along with a hit of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. 'Matcha tea has 137 times the antioxidant levels of green tea and contains caffeine. Unlike coffee, it releases caffeine slowly and has amino acids theophylline and theanine, which provide an energy boost lasting three to six hours,' reveals Anita.

2PM CURB SNACKING
Uh-oh, the post-lunch snack attack! Watching your waistline can be a struggle in a workplace surrounded by treats, but it can be done. When cravings hit, Yogi Snack Tea (£2.19, www.goodnessdirect.co.uk) will help you resist temptation. The sweet mint infusion combines peppermint and spearmint with Chinese berries and Assam tea. 'Fruit teas evoke sweetness, fulfilling the need for a sweet snack,' says Anita.

3.30PM BOOST ENERGY
Need a double espresso to revive flagging concentration? Believe it or not, consuming caffeine within eight hours of bedtime can mess with sleep patterns. Research by the Mayo Clinic found too much caffeine can lead to restlessness and irritability, so steer clear and opt for a natural pick-me-up instead. Dr Stuart's Ginkgo Plus (£2.09, www.baldwins.co.uk) supports the nervous system by supplying additional oxygen to nerve cells. Perfect for keeping you focused, 'it helps enhance memory and concentration,' explains Anita.

5PM CARE FOR YOUR KIDNEYS
It's almost the end of the working day, and according to Chinese herbal medicine, 5pm also signifies the time when your kidneys and bladder need to be working at an optimum level. Heath & Heather Organic Nettle Tea (£1.49, www.heathandheather.co.uk) aids urinary health thanks to its diuretic and soothing effects. 'Nettle tea contains loads of nutrients with anti-inflammatory effects,' says Anita.

8PM AID DIGESTION
Peppermint has long been the after-dinner drink of choice for those in the know. The zingy tea helps to ease the digestive system, soothing gas, bloating and indigestion. 'Peppermint has antispasmodic and soothing effects on the intestinal tract and can help to ease spasms, cramps and gas,' reveals Anita. In need of some relief? Try Asda Chosen By You Peppermint Tea (£1, www.asda.com).

9.30PM SLEEP EASY
A nightcap is an essential part of any good bedtime routine. Clipper Sleep Easy Tea, (£1.35, http://shop.clipper-teas.com) is a calming combo of chamomile, honeybush, lemon balm and valerian. 'Chamomile promotes relaxation, calms the nerves, alleviates insomnia and aids sleep,' says Anita. Valerian is a well known sleep-inducing herb while lemon balm also works as a gentle sedative. 'Lemon balm can be used to calm the nerves and soothe the intestinal tract,' Anita adds. Perfect for winding down before you hit the hay.

'Fruit teas evoke a sense of sweetness, fulfilling the need for a sweet snack'

MORE HERBAL HEROES

Before your period
Birt & Tang Cycle Plus combats PMS symptoms. ■ £1.99, www.birtandtang.co.uk

During times of stress
Waitrose Love Life Chamomile, Limeflower & Lavender Infusion helps to soothe frazzled nerves. ■ 99p, Waitrose

To beat sugar cravings
Tesco Finest Chocolate Tea is a sweet treat, minus the guilt! ■ £1.79, Tesco