

Victorian Tea Etiquette

Traditional teatime is four o'clock; however any time between two and five o'clock may be appropriate.¹

Tea Equipment:

A china tea set consists of:

- a teapot, creamer for the milk and a sugar bowl
- a pitcher of hot water (for those who prefer weak tea)
- a plate for lemon slices arranged on a wooden or tin tray are fine

Flatware is necessary when serving cake. Soft and sticky or cream filled cakes require a fork. If there is jam or cream, the place setting requires a knife. If there are dishes with jam and cream where everyone takes a portion, each dish should have its own serving spoon. *Never use your own utensils to dip into the jam or cream dish.*

When seated at a table in a private home or in a tearoom, there should be at each place setting:

- A knife or butter spreader on the right side of the plate and a fork on the left side.
- A teaspoon may be placed on the saucer holding the cup or to the right of the knife.²

Napkins - The truly formal way to place a napkin is to the left of the plate, with the folded edge to the left and the open edge to the right. Under no circumstances should a napkin be left on a chair. If excusing yourself from the table, the napkin should be set back to the left of the plate. At the end of dining, neatly folding the napkin with a crease and placing it back on the left of the plate is an indicator to the host that you wish to be invited back.

Scones - Never cut scones directly in half and spread jam and butter on them. The proper way to eat scones is to tear off bite-sized chunks, then use a knife to apply butter, jam and cream.

Table Manners - It's customary for the host to pour the tea, and for the teapot to be left on the table with the spout facing the person who poured. At the table, the proper manner to drink tea is to raise the teacup, leaving the saucer on the table, and to place the cup back on the saucer between sips. It's considered rude to look anywhere but into the cup when sipping tea, and absolutely no slurping!

Don't cause a stir - The 'proper' way to stir is to place the spoon at a 12 o'clock position in the cup and softly fold the liquid back and forth 2-3 times to the 6 o'clock position, and never ever leave the teaspoon in the cup. Under no circumstances must you stir tea in a circular motion! When your teaspoon isn't being used, pop it back on the saucer, to the right of the cup.³

Faux pas:

- Cradling the cup in one's fingers when it has a handle or swirling the liquid around in the cup
- Filling the cup with tea almost to the rim
- Leaving a spoon upright in the cup, placing the spoon on the saucer in front of the cup or letting the spoon drop with a clank onto the saucer
- Making unnecessary noise by touching the sides of the cup with the spoon.
- Dunking cookies or scones⁴

Works Cited

Tea Etiquette. (n.d.). Retrieved from Twinings: <https://www.twinings.co.uk/about-twinings/latest-news-and-articles/tea-etiquette>
Tea Etiquette. (2019). Retrieved from Etiquette Scholar: https://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining_etiquette/tea_etiquette.html

- 1 (Tea Etiquette, 2019)
- 2 (Tea Etiquette, n.d.)
- 3 (Tea Etiquette, n.d.)
- 4 (Tea Etiquette, 2019)