

Of Sailors Scurvy and Limejuice

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We, who grew up on Indian flag ships, were so used to consuming lime juice at 1100 ship's time, that this time of the day came to be known as "Limejuice time." This tradition of the sea has a long history. Some two and a half centuries ago no one was surprised if a sailor had scurvy or died of it. It was a part of a sailor's life (and death for some). Scurvy was considered a dreadful infectious disease. It gave the poor victim swollen legs, bleeding gums, easily bruised skin and ugly looks. One such sailor was abandoned on an island to die, by the ship's captain. He chewed on fresh grass on the island and returned home cured.

James Lind, a naval surgeon (No, he did not perform surgeries on peoples navels, he served the navy); heard this story. He experimented with limes and oranges and discovered that the juice of citrus fruits prevented and even cured scurvy. That is how the compulsory drink of lime juice on British naval ships started, followed by merchant ships of the commonwealth countries. And that is why the term Limy for a Briton.

