



The Wolfe Clinic News



Coffee, The New Health Drink

Benefits of Coffee

Usually we don't associate coffee with healthy foods. On the contrary, it has a long history of being blamed for many evils, from stunted growth to claims that it causes heart disease and cancer. Recent research, though, indicates that coffee is not the bad boy some make it out to be; in fact, it may be just the opposite. These studies suggest that it doesn't just give us a boost in the morning, it is a highly beneficial and healthy drink. Not only does it turn out to be good for you, there is strong evidence that coffee lowers the risk of several serious ailments, including cirrhosis of the liver, diabetes, cancer and heart disease. Surprisingly, in some cases the benefits increase directly with the number of cups you drink.

Among the new research is a methodical examination of studies published recently in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, which concluded that regular coffee consumption was consistently linked to a lower risk of Type 2 diabetes. Exactly why was not determined but the authors offered two possible explanations. First, they believe that coffee contains potent antioxidants that limit cell damage

that may contribute to the advancement of the disease. And second, they explained that coffee is a good source of chlorogenic acid, which has been shown to reduce glucose concentrations.

Another study at Harvard University School of Public Health that found the risk of developing type 2 diabetes could be cut by as much as 50 percent in men and by as much as 30 percent in women who drank coffee daily. The tests were designed to offset other risk factors such as age, diet and weight, and so coffee drinking was isolated as the source of the benefit. This study confirmed what other studies were reporting.

These tests began when researchers noticed that people who drank more than 7 cups of coffee a day were unlikely to develop the disease. It appeared that consuming large quantities of coffee was especially supportive in diabetes prevention. Another group of researchers combined the statistical data from other studies and reported that people who drank four to six cups of coffee a day had a 28 percent reduced risk compared with those who drank two or less. Drinking more than six cups a day produced a risk reduction of greater than 35 percent. Other analysis' that looked



Inside This Issue

Page 1: Benefits of Coffee



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"FEAR IS THE GREATEST DISEASE"

only at decaffeinated coffee found the same degree of risk reduction. Their results also showed that it was the distinctive coffee compounds that provided the healthy benefits. There were no beneficial effects or protection from other caffeinated beverages.

Contrary to folklore, drinking coffee does not increase cardiovascular risk. In fact coffee consumption reduces the danger of heart disease. According to the New York Times:

“Using data on more than 27,000 women ages 55 to 69 in the Iowa Women’s Health Study who were followed for 15 years, Norwegian researchers found that women who drank one to three cups a day reduced their risk of cardiovascular disease by 24 percent compared with those drinking no coffee at all.

But as the quantity increased, the benefit decreased. At more than six cups a day, the risk was not significantly reduced. Still, after controlling for age, smoking and alcohol consumption, women who drank one to five cups a day — caffeinated or decaffeinated — reduced their risk of death from all causes during the study by 15 to 19 percent compared with those who drank none.

The findings, which appeared in May in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, suggest that antioxidants in coffee may dampen inflammation, reducing the risk of disorders related to it, like cardiovascular disease. Several compounds in coffee may contribute to its antioxidant capacity, including phenols, volatile aroma compounds and oxazoles that are efficiently absorbed.”

Two other studies published in the Annals of Internal Medicine and conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health followed participants for over 20 years to learn how



lifestyle choices affect overall health. They concluded that there was no connection between coffee drinking and the risk of cardiovascular disease or death. In fact, their conclusion was just the opposite. They found that those who reported higher amounts of coffee consumption actually had a lower death rate from any cause and a significantly lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

Researchers are learning that coffee consumption is associated with many other health benefits:

- Coffee is a powerful antioxidant. Raw coffee beans contain over 1,000 antioxidants and the roasting and brewing processes can add hundreds more. In a study, published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, researchers discovered and reported that a typical serving of coffee contains more antioxidants than typical servings of grape juice, blueberries, raspberries and oranges. *“We were surprised to learn that coffee*

quantitatively is the major contributor of antioxidants in the diet both in Norway and in the U.S.A.” said Rune Blomhoff, a professor of nutrition at the University of Oslo and the senior author of the analysis.

Another study conducted in Switzerland by the Nestle Research Center and published in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry found that coffee also outperforms herbal teas and red wine. The health benefits of antioxidants are extensive and these studies are clearly showing that coffee is one of the major sources of antioxidants in our diet. Of course, the precise antioxidant content varies from cup to cup, depending on the type of bean, roasting, amount of coffee used, time brewed and brewing method.

- Coffee decreases the risk of Alzheimer's disease. According to research published by the Byrd Alzheimer's Institute in Florida in the Journal of Neuroscience, caffeine intake not only appears to protect against Alzheimer's but may actually help those who already have the disease. Their research shows that caffeine plays a role in both the prevention and alleviation of Alzheimer's symptoms.

Many scientists believe that coffee may block the disruptive effects of high cholesterol that is linked to Alzheimer's disease. A study in the Journal of Neuroinflammation concludes that just one cup of coffee a day helped to protect the blood-brain barrier from damage that occurred with a high-fat diet.

As well, several other recent studies have reached the similar conclusions. They compared light coffee drinkers (one cup a day or less) with moderate coffee drinkers (2-3 cups a day) and found those who drank more coffee were significantly less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease. This means the more coffee you drink, the lower your chances are for developing the disease.

- Coffee reduces the risk of Parkinson's disease. A large number of independent research studies found that regular coffee drinkers were significantly less likely to contract Parkinson's Disease. As well, they found a direct relationship between the amount of coffee consumed and the likelihood of developing this ailment. In other words, the more they drink, the lower the risk. These research papers concluded that those who regularly drink

coffee are 60 to 80 percent less likely to develop Parkinson's.

Coffee reduces the risk of gallstone or gallbladder disease. In two separate studies performed by the Harvard School of Public Health the consumption of caffeinated coffee was correlated with a lower incidence of gallstones and gallbladder disease in both men and women. All coffee brewing methods showed a decreased threat of this disease. The risk declined with increased coffee consumption.

- Coffee increases our cognitive abilities. It has been shown to increase short term recall and increase IQ. As well, those who regularly drank coffee were found to perform better on tests of reaction time, memory functions and reasoning; with a direct relationship between test scores and the amount of coffee regularly drunk. Research concludes that regular coffee drinkers frequently score significantly higher on cognitive ability tests, spatial awareness exams, IQ tests, and short term memory studies.

The effects of coffee on an individual's cognitive ability are more prominent in the elderly and women. Elderly participants have the largest effect associated with regular coffee drinking



and women over the age of 80 performed significantly better on cognitive tests if they regularly drank coffee.

- Coffee reduces the risk of cancer. There is no scientific basis for believing that drinking coffee will increase the risk of developing cancer anywhere in the body. On the contrary, scientists have long suspected a link between coffee and cancer protection and recently German researchers identified the connection. It is a powerful antioxidant found almost exclusively in coffee; methylpyridinium.

Methylpyridinium is a potent anticancer compound shown to reduce the risk of colon and other cancers. It is not present in raw coffee beans but formed during the roasting process from a chemical called trigonelline, found naturally in coffee beans. The stronger the coffee, the higher the level of the compound. Darker roasts contain two to three times more than medium roasts. Methylpyridinium is in caffeinated, decaffeinated coffee and instant coffee. This compound is not found in any significant amounts in other foods.



More likely than not, other powerful antioxidants present in coffee also play an important role in cancer prevention since coffee consumption is linked to a reduced risk of oral, esophageal, pharyngeal cancer and a modest reduction in breast cancer in postmenopausal women.

As well, researchers are reporting that coffee drinkers as compared to those who do not drink coffee are 40 percent less likely to be diagnosed with liver cancer. Those who drank more than a one cup a day were 55 percent less likely to have been diagnosed with this form of cancer than those who didn't drink any coffee at all. The researchers speculate that coffee helps because it stimulates liver enzymes.

- Coffee enhances analgesics. Caffeine increases the effectiveness of pain killers. For this reason many over the counter pain killers contain caffeine.
- Coffee is associated with a reduced risk for gout. Over a 12-year period, a large study was conducted that showed coffee consumed was directly

related to the risk or likelihood of developing gout.

- Coffee reduces the risk of liver disease. Researchers report that coffee consumption can cut the risk of liver cirrhosis by 80 percent. The same studies found coffee drinkers, even those who were heavy alcohol abusers, had better results on blood tests used to measure liver function. Coffee has also been associated to a reduced risk of liver cancer that is usually associated with pre-existing cirrhosis. The anti-inflammatory properties of coffee may explain why it decreases these risks.
- In addition to protecting against disease, coffee has a positive impact on a wide array of our activities. It is a performance enhancer and research has proved that coffee relieves tiredness, increases concentration and improves reactions. Studies on the effects of coffee on muscle strength shows that it does improve their overall power and keeps them stimulated for longer. Coffee may help with stimulating muscle contraction by increasing the release of calcium allowing them to work harder for a longer time. A study published in Current Sports Medicine



Reports found that coffee improved performance and endurance during prolonged, exhaustive exercise.

Again, most of us do not associate coffee with healthy foods. On the contrary, we tend to think of coffee as a junk food and unfairly blame it for all sorts of ills. The truth is, though, coffee is one of the healthiest drinks you can have after fresh water. It really is beneficial to your wellbeing. So go ahead and order that latte or have that second cup. You're doing your body a healthy favor.



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