

Seven Healthy Perks of Coffee

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Your morning just got better.

1. Reduced Heart Disease Risk

Drinking coffee can dramatically reduce your risk of heart disease, according to a report recently presented at the European Association for Cardiovascular Prevention & Rehabilitation's 2015 meeting.

The report, published by the Institute for Scientific Information on Coffee, or ISIC, a nonprofit dedicated to the study of coffee's effects on health, details myriad studies linking java-drinking to heart health. For instance, a recent American Journal of Epidemiology study that shows drinking three to five cups of coffee per day could cut an individual's risk of dying from cardiovascular disease by up to 21 percent.

What's more, further research shows it may prevent heart disease from developing in the first place. In a 2015 Heart study of 25,000 men and women with no evidence of heart disease, researchers found that those who reported drinking three to five cups of coffee per day had the lowest amount of calcium buildup in their coronary arteries.

"Although the precise mechanism of action is unknown, this may be attributable to coffee's anti-inflammatory properties, to caffeine and/or further compounds found within coffee including antioxidants," says Karla Koullias, chairman of the ISIC scientific committee.

But your heart isn't the only thing coffee can protect. Here are six more healthy benefits of firing up your coffee machine.

2. Reduced Risk of Type 2 Diabetes

In a recent study from the Harvard School of Public Health, men and women who upped their daily coffee intake lowered their risk of Type 2 diabetes by 11 percent in just four years. Meanwhile, those who decreased their coffee intake by more than a cup per day increased their risk by 17 percent. While the exact mechanism is not known, chlorogenic acid (an antioxidant) and magnesium's influence on metabolic pathways, glucose metabolism and inflammation may play a role, says Ashley Harris, a registered dietitian at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

Moreover, coffee may hit Type 2 diabetes with a one-two punch by reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, Koullias says. People with Type 2 diabetes typically have a higher cardiovascular disease mortality risk, as insulin resistance is linked with high blood pressure, according to the American Heart Association.

3. Faster Weight Loss

Researchers can't seem to agree on coffee and caffeine's effects on weight loss; while compounds such as chlorogenic acid and quinides in coffee may potentially aid in weight loss, excessive intake has been linked with weight gain. Either way, if you don't load your coffee with cream and sugar, coffee can be a healthy part of a calorie-controlled diet, Koullias says. After all, an 8-ounce cup of black coffee contains a single calorie.

How coffee really makes a dent in the scale is by increasing your exercise performance. The American College of Medicine has stated that caffeine intake fuels exercise performance and can result in longer, harder workouts. And a recent study from the University of Birmingham shows that, despite what you've probably heard, coffee doesn't dehydrate the body, meaning it's a perfect pre-workout drink.

4. Improved Cognitive Function

You probably drink it to wake up and get focused but, over the long term, coffee may prevent the formation of amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles, buildups of protein in the brain, both of which are trademarks of Alzheimer's disease, according to Koullias. She notes that coffee is rich in free radical-scavenging antioxidants, which are believed to reduce inflammation and decrease the deterioration of brain cells throughout the aging process.

Luckily, coffee can have a protective effect, no matter your age (or cognitive health). In fact, in adults 65 and older who are already showing signs of memory problems, drinking three cups of coffee per day may delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease by two to four years, according in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.

5. Better Kidney and Liver Health

Frequent post-coffee trips to the bathroom make one thing clear: Coffee has huge effects on your gastrointestinal and urinary tract. But they aren't all inconvenient. By increasing urinary flow, caffeine decreases the potential for deposits to linger and form kidney stones. One 2014 study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that people who consumed caffeine had lower risks of kidney stones.

Coffee is also linked to a lower risk of gallbladder and liver disease. In one 2014 Hepatology study, researchers examined the coffee-drinking habits of 27,793 people and found that compared with people who drank no coffee, those who drank three cups a day (regular or decaf) were about 25 percent less likely to have abnormal liver enzyme levels compared to people who didn't run on coffee. The reason is currently unknown.

6. A Smaller Risk of Cancer

Research is increasingly linking consumption of both regular and decaf coffee to a reduction in certain types of cancer, Harris says. For instance, a 2011 study published in Breast Cancer Research found that women who drink five or more cups of coffee a day are 57 percent less likely to develop estrogen receptor-negative breast cancer compared to women who drink less than a cup a day. And, in men, drinking four or more cups of coffee per day is linked with a 59 percent reduced risk of prostate cancer recurrence and/or progression compared to those who drank one or fewer cups each week, per a 2013 study from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

The connection may go back to those free-radical fighting antioxidants. Researchers behind the prostate-cancer study note that diterpenes cafestol and kahweol, fat-soluble compounds in coffee, may inhibit cancer growth, while chlorogenic acid can inhibit DNA mutations. What's more, caffeine can inhibit cell growth and has been linked, independent of coffee consumption, to reduced incidences of basal-cell carcinoma and ovarian cancer.

7. Enhanced Sexual Health

Many sexual woes, including erectile dysfunction and decreased vaginal lubrication are a matter of blood not getting where it needs to be. So, by improving arterial health and decreasing the risk of plaque formation, coffee may not only improve heart health. It may improve sexual health. For example, a 2015 PLOS ONE study shows that men who consumed two to three coffee cups' worth of caffeine per day had the lowest incidence of ED.

Meanwhile, caffeine may also get women's brains in the mood. In a 2005 animal study from Southwestern University, researchers found that coffee intake stimulated the parts of female mouse brains that signal sexual arousal.