

Coffee May Prevent Against an Irregular Heart Beat

By Elizabeth Millard, *Runner's World*



- A study presented as part of the Heart Rhythm Society online meeting found that one to two cups of coffee per day can lower your risk of heart arrhythmia, or an irregular heart beat.
- This is possibly due to the fact that coffee is rich in polyphenols—plant compounds full of antioxidants—which have been linked to better cell function in the heart and blood vessels.

You love the pick-me-up that coffee brings when it comes to giving you the energy for your early morning miles. But is all that caffeine day after day tough on your heart? Recent research suggests the opposite may be true.

In a study presented as part of the Heart Rhythm Society online meeting, researchers looked at data on more than 350,000 participants in the U.K. Biobank, an effort that collected information on about half a million people aged between 40 to 69 for a four-year timespan. Participants provided blood, urine, and saliva samples regularly, as well as details about their habits and medical histories.

Focusing on the number of arrhythmia (irregular heart beat) events—which happens when the rate or rhythm of the heartbeat is affected, and can lead to serious complications like blood clots—as well as coffee consumption, researchers noted that each daily cup of coffee up to four cups was associated with lower incidence of arrhythmia, lead researcher Eunjeong Kim, M.D., a clinical fellow of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, told *Runner's World*.

“The main message of our study is that it doesn’t appear to be harmful to continue with moderate amounts of regular coffee consumption in terms of overall arrhythmia risk,” she said.

The sweetest spot for lowering risk seemed to be one to two cups, the research suggests, and five cups was when the risks started to level out. So, a few cups are protective, but more is not always better. Still, those drinking as many as five or six cups daily still had lower incidence of arrhythmic episodes, Kim added.

Keep in mind that the study is observational and these results are correlative, which means researchers didn’t prove coffee actually *causes* better heart function. That said, this study adds to others that showcase the potential benefits of caffeine, and coffee specifically.

For example, a 2011 study noted that physicians often advise patients with arrhythmia to avoid caffeinated coffee in the belief that it increases heart palpitations, but that controlled experiments have shown there's no evidence of that effect. Much like the recent study, this research also concluded that total caffeine intake was related to lower arrhythmia risk.

Another study, done on nearly 19,000 people, also showed a statistically significant decrease in the incidence of an irregular heartbeat over a period of nine years for those who drank one to three cups of coffee daily.

Why is coffee so beneficial for heart health? While Kim and her colleagues didn’t explore the exact reason, coffee is rich in polyphenols—plant compounds full of antioxidants—which have been linked to better cell function in the heart and blood vessels. This, in turn, can prevent against other heart issues, too, such as heart disease and stroke.

The message is clear: Your java habit is more likely to jumpstart your energy levels than your heart.

Elizabeth Millard is a freelance writer focusing on health, wellness, fitness, and food.