

Is Black Coffee Good for You?

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Nov. 02, 2020

Coffee is a popular morning beverage loaded with health benefits. Here's how drinking black coffee affects your body and mind.

It's no secret that **coffee** is one of the most popular beverages out there. More than half of adult Americans drink coffee daily, according to the National Coffee Association. Some people fill their cups with lots of cream and sugar, but other people take their coffee black, avoiding all the added sugar and fats.

Black or not, do the often-touted **health benefits of coffee** outweigh the potentially harmful effects? Yes, say the experts, but moderation is key.

Coffee is a surprising source of nutrients

According to a study published in 2013 the journal *Antioxidants*, coffee has **more antioxidants than wine** and tea. These antioxidants may help prevent certain cancers, **heart disease**, and **type 2 diabetes**.

Coffee also contains beneficial nutrients including **magnesium**, and B vitamins niacin and riboflavin. Although the amounts of these vitamins aren't very high, they can add up when you drink several cups, explains Erin Palinski-Wade, a registered dietitian in Hamburg, New Jersey.

What about **decaf coffee**? It can also provide these benefits, though the levels of nutrients may be reduced because of the caffeine extraction process, explains Soma Mandal, MD, a board-certified internist at Summit Medical Group in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey

Caffeine may help your alertness and mood

In studies, caffeine has been shown to have a positive effect on **cognition**, alertness, and mood, in addition to preventing negative effects such as drowsiness in people who are sleep-deprived, says Dr. Mandal. According to research published in 2014 in *Psychopharmacology*, **caffeine improved vigilance**, reaction time, and logical reasoning in shift workers, truck drivers, and emergency responders. In the study, 20 Special Forces personnel in these categories received either four 200-milligram doses of caffeine or a placebo during late-evening and early-morning hours on three consecutive days. Their vigilance, logical reasoning, and cognitive function were assessed throughout the study.

The researchers concluded that a total daily dose of 800 milligrams of caffeine during extended periods of wakefulness was effective in boosting cognitive function when participants were not able to sleep through the day."Coffee basically acts as a stimulant in these cases, but mild to moderate doses can be very helpful in these sorts of situations," Dr. Mandal says. (Learn more about the other effects of **daily coffee drinking**.)

Research on caffeine, cognition, and mood are combined in many studies. More analysis on just mood and caffeine is necessary. One article published in *Nutrients* in 2018 looked specifically at caffeine and depression. Researchers found that people who had at least four cups of coffee per day showed a **lower risk of depression** than those who drank less than one cup of coffee per day.

Caffeine may help protect your brain

Some studies have suggested that coffee consumption can contribute to a reduced risk of conditions such as **Alzheimer's** and **Parkinson's**, but this research is limited, she says. Here's what researchers have found so far:

A 2016 meta-analysis of studies including nearly 30,000 participants found that increased coffee consumption is associated with a **lower risk of Alzheimer's disease**. One study in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* found that people who drank three to five cups of coffee daily had as much as a 65 percent **decreased risk of developing dementia**.

Coffee has also been linked to a lower risk of Parkinson's disease. Researchers analyzed more than 30 years of data from more than 8,000 Japanese-American men. They found those who drank at least 28 ounces (about three to four cups) of coffee a day, compared to those who drank no coffee or very little, were associated with a **lower risk of Parkinson's** disease.

Caffeine may lower your risk of type-2 diabetes

Research published in *Diabetologia* tracked the coffee intake of more than 100,000 U.S. men and women over 20 years. They found that people who had an additional cup of coffee per day had an 11 percent lower risk for **developing type 2 diabetes**. Other research published in 2018 in *Nutrition, Metabolism, and Cardiovascular Diseases* also links long-term coffee consumption to a lower risk of **both pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes**.

What about heart disease and coffee?

Prior concern and controversy over **heart disease risk** and caffeine have been mostly dismissed. A report in the *Expert Review of Cardiovascular Therapy* looking at controlled studies found that three to four cups of coffee a day is associated with either a **neutral or positive effect on blood pressure**, cardiovascular disease, and heart failure. In a review published in *The Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry*, researchers found that drinking three to five cups of coffee per day is associated with a 15 percent reduction in the **risk of cardiovascular disease**, and higher consumption has not been linked to elevated cardiovascular risk.

Black coffee may be the healthier choice

There are a variety of options to customize your coffee cup. This includes sweeteners and dairy or non-dairy milk, as well as creamers. However, many coffee drinkers around the world still prefer to drink their coffee black, and they're on to something. Adding large amounts of **added sugars** and saturated fat (through whole milk or creamers) to your drink may offset health benefits and increase health risks, Palinski-Wade says. High amounts of added sugar can increase the risk of heart disease and **type 2 diabetes**, while high amounts of saturated fats can increase blood lipids, or **cholesterol**, and increase heart disease risk.

"The best way to drink coffee would be black or with unsweetened flavorings like a dash of cinnamon," Palinski-Wade says. "Adding low-fat or **plant-based milk** to coffee would be a better alternative over heavy cream containing large amounts of saturated fat." (Don't miss this **healthy homemade creamer recipe** this dietitian loves.)

"If you were to take away a teaspoon of sugar and two tablespoons of creamer per two cups of coffee per day, that's a savings of over 100 calories a day, which can equate to preventing you from gaining 10 pounds in a year," says registered dietitian nutritionist Amy Gorin, owner of Amy Gorin Nutrition in New York City.

Coffee can count toward your daily hydration goals

Although some people think coffee acts as a diuretic and **can be dehydrating**, in reality, it can count toward your daily **hydration** needs, Gorin says. In fact, a 2014 study in the journal *PLOS One* suggests up to four cups of coffee per day can count toward your **water intake**. The study examined 50 physically active male coffee drinkers who drank three to six cups of coffee per day and found no significant differences or abnormalities within blood or urine hydration markers. This suggests that when consumed in moderation, coffee can provide similar hydrating qualities to water.

The healthiest way to brew coffee

Some research points to a healthier way to make your coffee. The brewing method of choice matters, according to a 2020 research article in the *European Journal of Preventative Cardiology*. The researchers found that **unfiltered coffee** is associated with a higher death rate in comparison to that of filtered brew. And filtered coffee is healthier than not drinking any coffee at all, per the article. So it's a good idea to skip the French press for a **healthier coffee habit**.

So how much coffee can you have?

Your recommended coffee intake depends on age, body size, and **caffeine** tolerance, says Palinski-Wade. Most people shouldn't exceed 400 milligrams of caffeine each day—that's the amount in about four 8-ounce cups of coffee. Higher amounts can have a negative impact on **stress** hormones in the body and suppress the release of the feel-good hormone **serotonin**. Drinking more than the recommended amount may also potentially increase your **blood pressure**, says Dr. Mandal.

And if you're **pregnant** or breastfeeding, you should limit your daily intake to no more than 200 milligrams, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

The takeaway

If you tend to feel **anxious** and experience **palpitations** after consuming caffeine, or experience **stomach discomfort** that frequently stimulates your bowels, you might be best off reducing your caffeine intake or eliminating caffeine altogether, Dr. Mandal says.

"Additionally, if you tend to have sleep quality issues or experience **insomnia**, I typically recommend stopping caffeine consumption by noon each day," she says.

If you find that you just don't respond well to coffee but are seeking a morning or afternoon pick-me-up, you may find that **drinking tea** or even a **brisk 30-minute walk** can help to revive your energy levels similarly to how a cup of coffee might, she says. As always, talk to your doctor if you have concerns about any underlying conditions.