



Coffee and Health

By: Gary E. Foresman, MD

Coffee is among the most widely consumed beverages in the world. I have noticed with great interest while study after study documents that habitual coffee consumption substantially lowers the risk of mortality, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, many degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, and many types of cancers. Yet so many people in the "natural health" world proclaim coffee to be "bad" for you. Why? Given America's puritanical heritage one can come to only one logical conclusion: "Since it feels good, it must be bad for you". Certainly it's not science that causes us to not only question the health benefits of this extraordinary beverage but to continue in the quest to look for what damage it must do to us!?

This healthy "supplement" to the diet includes antioxidants, polyphenols with anticancer properties, chlorogenic acid that has antioxidant effects and improves insulin sensitivity, two diterpenes known as cafestrol and kahweol that work with our detoxification system to both inhibit the Phase I enzymes that can activate carcinogens while they stimulate Phase II enzymes that aid in carcinogen detoxification, and of course caffeine which inhibits the hypermethylation of DNA common to tumor cells. If that sentence seems like a bunch of scientific rationale for the pluripotent powerful health benefits of a complex array of compounds present in this beverage, it is. Multiple compounds also help explain the overall anti-inflammatory effects as well.

Outside of an enormous body of data documenting why coffee might be of benefit, there are multitudinous epidemiologic and case-control studies proving coffee to be one of the most consistently health-promoting habits ever studied. One obvious caveat is that if you personally react negatively to coffee (or any purportedly healthy substance), stop consuming it. Never let science supersede your own common sense. Let's look at what has been proven in regards to caffeinated coffee so far:

CANCER

1. **Breast Cancer** Various long-term trials document from 12-50% reduction in the risk of breast cancer in postmenopausal women. Premenopausal women with the BRCA mutation have a 70% risk reduction. Drinking more than five cups of coffee per day is necessary to get the full benefit.
2. **Colon Cancer** Over thirty clinical trials document a 12% reduction in the risk of developing colon cancer.
3. **Liver Cancer** Daily coffee consumption provides an overall 51% reduction in risk of death from hepatocellular cancer and a 69% reduction in those with Hepatitis

- C. No trial of interferon has ever proven any benefit in hepatocellular cancer mortality where coffee can prevent cirrhosis and cancer.
4. No cancer ever studied has been found to be associated with coffee consumption.

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

After suffering from a heart attack, drinking 5-7 cups of coffee per day led to a 48% reduction in the risk of overall mortality compared with non-coffee drinkers among patients studied for 7-9 years. This is a far greater reduction in mortality than any 'statin' drug. In the Framingham study any coffee consumption at all was associated with a 10 year, 43% reduction in cardiovascular mortality primarily by slowing the progression of vascular heart disease.

Furthermore, a fascinating trial about the effects of mental stress on blood pressure documents coffee's blood pressure stabilization effects on habitual coffee drinkers. In 15 healthy volunteers mental stress led to a 14 point rise in systolic blood pressure. When given a triple espresso (with or without caffeine), the non-habitual coffee drinkers had an additional 9 point rise during mental stress (a total 23 points above the baseline). However, the triple espresso blunted any rise in blood pressure in the habitual coffee drinkers. This means coffee helps prevent mental stress effects in people who routinely drink coffee.

Finally, an analysis of the nurses' health study in over 24 years of follow-up drinking greater than 4 cups of coffee per day led to a dramatic 43% reduction in stroke risk. Drinking other caffeinated beverages had no effect on stroke risk whereas decaffeinated coffee seemed to provide a mild benefit. Smoking eliminated any of the risk reduction benefits seen with coffee consumption.

DIABETES

For every cup of coffee per day one drinks, a statistically significant decrease in the risk of Type 2 diabetes occurs. For those who drink more than 6 cups of coffee per day their overall diabetes risk decreases by an astounding 35%!

GOUT

Drinking coffee leads to a significant reduction in uric acid and subsequently drinking 4 or more cups of coffee per day reduces the chance of developing gout by almost 40%! No such benefits were found with tea.

MUSCULAR HEALTH

Multiple trials confirm that caffeinated coffee provides at least a 50% reduction in perceived pain with exercise.

NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASES

This is yet another area of research where numerous trials confirm such a profound health benefit with ageing. Whether due to antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, detoxifying, or other properties, it is clear that the whole (coffee) is greater than the sum of its many fine parts.

- Parkinson's Disease (PD): In a study spanning 13 years, drinking more than 5 cups of coffee per day or three cups of tea per day led to an amazing 60% reduction in the risk of developing PD.
- Alzheimer's Disease (AD): In another study covering 21 years of follow-up, drinking 3-5 cups of coffee per day led to an shocking 65% reduction in the risk of developing AD. No such benefits were seen from drinking tea.

Whether preserving the health of heart, brain, or liver, coffee consumption has no parallel in the natural or pharmaceutical world. Drink responsibly and listen to your own body. I recommend that for each cup of coffee you drink, be sure to drink twice as much water to keep the body well hydrated.

Your Journey to Health and Healing,
Gary E. Foresman, MD

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Website: www.middlepathmedicine.com

E-mail: info@middlepathmedicine.com