

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Coffee: Pros and Cons

For those who love its rich, full-bodied flavor, a cup of coffee is the perfect jump-start to the day. And research reveals that coffee may confer some health benefits. But there's also a con side to the coffee cup.



Dr. Gravesen believes patients need all of the facts — not just the ones capturing the headlines — when it comes to making well-informed health decisions. That's why Dr. Gravesen has devoted this issue of the *Optimal Health University*® handout to investigating both sides of the coffee issue.

The Pros

Boosts Antioxidant Levels

Coffee is a source of dietary antioxidants called polyphenols, which keep disease-causing free radical chemicals from damaging cells. “Both caffeinated and decaf versions appear to provide similar antioxidant levels,” according to researchers (*Nutr Today* 2005;40:245).

Minimizes Inflammation

Dr. Gravesen is interested in all-natural ways to stave off inflammation. A study published in May shows that imbibing an average of one to three cups of coffee per day may inhibit inflammation and thereby “reduce the risk of cardiovascular and other inflammatory diseases in post-

menopausal women.” (*Am J Clin Nutr* 2006;83:1039.) The researchers did not differentiate between caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee.

The 15-year analysis, which included 410,235 post-menopausal women, also proved the theory that “more” is not always “better.” The researchers noted that drinking more than three cups of coffee per day did not significantly increase the brew's anti-inflammatory benefits.

Enhances Well-Being

According to Dr. Peter R. Martin of Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Institute for Coffee Studies, “Work in the mid-1980s suggested that chlorogenic acids [chemicals in coffee] might have an effect on the opiate system in the brain. They may have antidepressant effects, which would make some sense because we know that drinking coffee gives people a sense of well-being. It's possible that these or other components of coffee may have an effect on reducing alcohol dependency.”

The plant hormone trigonelline, another anti-carcinogenic property found in coffee, may also have a sedative effect on the brain.

Curtails Cirrhosis

Consuming just one cup of coffee each day can slash a person's risk of developing alcohol-induced liver cirrhosis by more than 20 percent. And because the link appears to have nothing to do with caffeine, it doesn't mat-

ter whether you choose the “leaded” or “unleaded” version.

The 22-year analysis included 125,580 people whose medical history included the use of alcohol. Of the group, 330 developed cirrhosis of the liver. “Tea consumption had no effect on the risk of alcohol-associated liver cirrhosis, making it likely that a component of coffee other than caffeine is responsible.” (*Arch Intern Med* 2006; 166:1190-5.)

The researchers also found that each additional daily cup cut the risk of alcohol-associated cirrhosis by 22 percent: although it did not reduce the risk of other types of cirrhosis.

Prevents Post-Workout Soreness

The caffeine in coffee “improves performance and endurance during prolonged, exhaustive exercise. To a lesser degree it also enhances short-term, high-intensity athletic performance.” (*Curr Sports Med Rep* 2003;2:213-9.)

But that's not all. Studies show one or two cups of caffeinated coffee — prior to exertion — may prevent post-workout aches and pains.



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Reduces Parkinson's Risk

In a 30-year study of 8,004 Japanese-American men, coffee drinkers enjoyed a three- to six-fold reduced risk of developing Parkinson's disease, compared with noncoffee drinkers. Caffeine intake from noncoffee sources was also associated with a reduced risk (*JAMA* 2000;283:2674).

Bolsters Glucose Tolerance

Drinking two or more cups of coffee per day is associated with better glucose tolerance and a "substantially lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes in diverse populations in Europe, the US and Japan." (*Diabetes Care* 2006;29:398.)

This conclusion was based on a study of 88,259 women between the ages of 26 and 46 with no history of diabetes. Researchers also noted that decaffeinated coffee was just as effective as caffeinated.

This study is just one of many highlighting coffee's protective effect against developing Type 2 diabetes. Based on information gathered from more than 125,000 men and women, researchers in Australia concluded that "women who drank six or more cups of coffee a day had a 30 percent lower chance of developing Type 2 diabetes than those who did not drink coffee at all. Men who drank more than six cups of caffeinated coffee each day had a 50 percent lower chance compared to non-coffee drinkers." (*Aust Nurs J* 2004;11:31.)

The Cons

Insomnia

Caffeine can have a detrimental effect on sleep quality. And its diuretic and laxative effects can keep you dashing to the bathroom all night.

Drug-Rebound Headache

Coffee can stop a headache dead in its tracks. In fact, caffeine is a common ingredient in many headache medications. However, its long-term use may spark chronic "drug-rebound" headaches.

"Excessive caffeine consumption, mostly in the form of coffee and tea, is a well-recognized cause of headache and migraine." (*Cephalalgia* 2003;23:332-5.)

Bone Fracture

In a 10-year study of 31,527 Swedish women, researchers determined that drinking four cups of caffeinated coffee per day "significantly increased the risk of fracture, whereas tea drinking was not associated with risk." (*Osteoporos Int* 2006;17:1055-64.)

Glaucoma Concern

It's not unusual for ophthalmologists to instruct patients with glaucoma to avoid caffeinated coffee and other caffeine products. The reason, according to researchers, is that caffeine raises pressure inside the eye (*Ann Pharmacother* 2002;36:992-5).

High-Risk Pregnancy

According to researchers who analyzed more than 18,400 women, "Compared to pregnant women who didn't drink any coffee, those who drank four to seven cups daily had an 80 percent increased risk of stillbirth, and those who drank eight cups or more increased their risk threefold." (*RN* 2003;66:98.)

Caffeinated coffee consumption among pregnant women is also linked to a decrease in birth weight among infants. In a study of 2,291 women, those who regularly drank caffeinated coffee delivered lower-weight babies. Decaffeinated coffee, however, did not affect infant weight outcomes (*Am J Epidemiol* 2003;157:456-66).

Caffeinated vs. Decaffeinated

By now, you are probably saying to yourself, "The problem with coffee seems to center more on its caffeine status than the brew itself." And you're right. But decaf may pose hidden health risks as well, due to the chemical process employed to remove caffeine.

The procedure, developed in 1900 by

a German chemist, involves exposing green coffee beans to "steam and solvent in a rotating drum. The solvent absorbs the caffeine and more steam is used to wash out the caffeine-bearing solvent." (*Patient Care* 1986;20:179.)

Over the years, a number of chemicals have been used: only to be discontinued because they were proven to cause cancer. Today, the industry standard is methylene chloride or ethyl acetate. And while their safety, according to researchers, has "never been questioned," many health experts remain skeptical.

There is good news, however, for those who want to avoid caffeine and chemicals. There are chemical-free decaffeination processes available. For instance, the Swiss Water® process, which uses an eight-hour water filtration system, is 100 percent chemical-free (www.swisswater.com). To determine if your coffee of choice is chemically or naturally decaffeinated, check its label.

Cream and Sugar?

Cream? Sugar? Syrups? Artificial sweeteners? These additions may counteract coffee's potential health benefits.

Cream is packed with calories and fat. And even lower-fat dairy options, such as skim milk, may contain synthetic growth hormones. So, opt for organic dairy products or organic soy alternatives.

The syrups in many "designer" coffee drinks are loaded with sugar and artificial chemicals. Sugar substitutes also carry health risks. For a healthier option, try honey or melting a small square of dark organic chocolate (at least 60 percent cocoa) into your brew.

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