

Weighing the health benefits of coffee

15 April 2016, by Melissa Wdowik



Scientists report that the simple inhalation of coffee by rats has changed their gene expressions in ways that help reduce sleep deprivation-induced stress. Courtesy of public-domain-photos.com

Chances are, you or someone you know is a coffee drinker. Admittedly, I love coffee and my relationship with it is one of slight dependency. Thus I am fully invested in exploring the research into its health effects.

Coffee is the most consumed beverage in the world, second only to water. It has been known to man for thousands of years, with the roasting process beginning in the 13th century. It has become an increasingly popular beverage unlike any other – one that not only tastes good but offers a pick-me-up.

Many [coffee drinkers](#) will attest to its stimulant properties and effectiveness in increasing concentration and alertness. In fact, research supports this with evidence that drinking coffee improves driving ability. On the other hand, drinking coffee while driving is a distraction, so enjoy it before you get in the car.

Additional research shows coffee intake is associated with a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, stroke, heart arrhythmia, [high blood pressure](#), heart

disease and depression. A daily intake of two to three cups of coffee appears to be safe as well as potentially beneficial for these health outcomes.

Coffee may also be protective against cancer. A 2015 study found [coffee intake](#) of four or more cups daily inversely associated with skin cancer after 10 years. Coffee has also been associated with lower risk of colon and liver cancers.

For exercisers, coffee has been of interest as a performance enhancer. Some research shows drinking a cup of coffee 30 minutes before exercise increases endurance and performance. The downside is the stimulant and dehydrating effects in those who do not regularly consume coffee, so test it during training.

Earlier this month, researchers announced findings that coffee appears to decrease liver damage caused by alcohol, obesity, diabetes and other diseases. After analyzing nine large studies, they found risk for [liver damage](#) decreased with one cup of coffee daily and continued to decrease with each additional cup up to four cups daily.

Lastly, a large study by the National Institutes of Health found coffee drinkers between the ages of 50 and 71 had a lower risk of death over a 12-year period, with risk decreasing as coffee consumption increased. Compared to non-coffee drinkers, those who drank three or more cups had a 10 percent lower risk of death from [heart disease](#), respiratory disease, stroke, diabetes and infections.

What does all this research mean to you? First, most data on coffee's [health effects](#) are observational, meaning there is an association but not a proven causation. Second, it is unclear in many studies which characteristics of coffee are most beneficial. Coffee is complex, containing hundreds of biologically active compounds, and the type of coffee bean, roasting process and brewing method may all affect the chemical makeup of the beverage.

While we know coffee contains antioxidants, potassium, magnesium, vitamin E and niacin, non-coffee drinkers can certainly get these nutrients from other foods. Finally, the possible benefits of routine [coffee](#) consumption have to be weighed against potential risks including stomach upset, reflux, insomnia, tremors and increased heart rate.

Provided by Colorado State University

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