

Coffeetalk



COFFEE & YOUR BODY

“Coffee – the drink that comforts the brain and heart”

Sir Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626), English philosopher

The fact that billions of people around the world enjoy their coffee makes it a high profile beverage. So, it's not surprising that the beverage has come under much public scrutiny. For a long time, most of the questions centred upon the possible negative effects of coffee on the body. For example, is it safe to consume and does it cause illnesses?

More recently, however, the questions have begun shifting towards the more positive side. Some people are now asking whether coffee benefits the body and is able to enhance health, perhaps even reduce the risk of certain diseases. You would be pleased to know that these questions have actually been intensively researched for a long time in the scientific arena. We're slowly but surely uncovering the facts. But, in the meantime, let's take a look at what we do know.

A workout boost?

At one point in time, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) banned caffeine, which was then considered a drug. As a result, Olympians were forced to abstain from coffee and all the enjoyment it provided. Thankfully, the IOC was unable to justify the ban from a scientific standpoint and subsequently lifted it in 2004.

While Olympians are now allowed to drink coffee, a lot of scientific research is actually being done to ascertain whether there might be a significant connection between caffeine and physical performance. Some encouraging indications from the majority of studies are summarised in the box below.

Coffee Effects On Physical Performance

- **Better Capability.** Caffeine promotes muscle contraction, improves neuromuscular transmission and increases peak force generation, thus allowing for higher intensity workouts.
- **Increased Capacity.** Drinking coffee an hour before exercise noticeably increases the capacity for physical activity before reaching exhaustion point.
- **Longer Endurance.** It has been suggested that caffeine may improve the ability to perform moderate to high intensity exercises like running and cycling, lasting 30 -120 minutes.

Scientists acknowledge that caffeine has ergogenic (ie performance enhancing) effects although they are still unclear how. But if it works for athletes, whose careers revolve around physical performance, there's no reason why we can't benefit from it in the same way. After all, it's nice to know that a mere cup of coffee can make a positive difference to our workout.

A weight management aid?

Did you know that a plain black cup of coffee made with 2 grams of coffee powder without sugar or whitener contains less than 2 calories? But there may just be even better news, based on emerging scientific findings that coffee might help us manage our weight.

The body metabolises, or breaks down, nutrients like fats, proteins and carbohydrates to produce energy and raw materials for building cells and tissues. A higher metabolism would typically result in us feeling more energetic and, in some cases, becoming leaner. The rate of our metabolism depends on many factors – from our genetic make-up to our lifestyles.

It was theorised long ago that coffee might be able to increase fat metabolism. This view was subsequently echoed by several studies showing that metabolic rate and fat oxidation increased significantly after drinking two to three cups of coffee.

The exact mechanism remains a mystery, although some scientists believe that the caffeine in coffee stimulates the body's adrenal glands to release a hormone, called catecholamine. This, in turn, makes the heart pump faster while increasing the breakdown of fats to release energy to fuel the muscles.

Though the notion of drinking coffee to stay slim is attractive, remember, regular exercise and healthy eating habits are essential as part of a programme for weight management.



Coffee and Diseases

There is now a growing body of research work suggesting that coffee may have beneficial effects on our health, as shown in the table below.

So, by all means, enjoy your coffee in moderation (3-5 cups a day) and don't forget to lead a healthy lifestyle which includes sensible eating habits and regular physical activity.

Alzheimer's Disease

- Several studies have suggested that middle-aged coffee drinkers had less chance of developing Alzheimer's Disease later in life, compared with those drinking none or only a little coffee.
- The lowest risk was found in people who drank 3-5 cups a day.

Cancer

- An expert report, collaboratively published by the World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research, stated that it is unlikely that coffee drinking has any substantial effect on the risk of cancer of either the pancreas or of the kidney.
- Evidence from large scale population studies suggest that coffee drinking is associated with a lower risk of liver, kidney, breast and colorectal cancers.
- Additional well-designed studies are still needed to provide valuable insights into coffee consumption and the risk of cancer.

Cardiovascular Diseases

- Research is increasingly showing evidence that coffee consumption is not associated with increased risk of cardiovascular diseases.
- Conversely, studies are indicating that coffee may have potentially beneficial effects on the heart.

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

- While studies have shown that coffee does increase blood pressure, especially among people who do not take coffee regularly, the rise is insignificant and can hardly be said to promote hypertension.

Parkinson's Disease

- Since 1968, scientists have known that coffee drinking is related to a lower risk of developing Parkinson's Disease.
- More recently, a meta-analysis (which evaluated the findings of 13 published studies) suggested that coffee drinkers had 31% less chance of developing Parkinson's than non-coffee drinkers.