

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Coffee, Caffeine, and Conflicted Studies”

Americans drink an average of 3.1 cups of caffeinated coffee/day and the average size of a cup is 9 ounces. The U.S. spends \$40 billion on coffee each year. But, is it good or bad for us? Sales of caffeine-containing energy drinks are soaring. Energy drinks, such as Monster, 5-Hour Energy, Red Bull and Rockstar, rely on caffeine to produce stimulate the central nervous system. The current popularity and expansion of caffeine added to foods is "beyond anything FDA envisioned or recommended." There have already been consumer reports of deaths from overuse of energy drinks or energy shots. The American Academy of Pediatrics says caffeine has been linked to harmful effects on young people's developing neurologic and cardiovascular systems. However, millions of Americans consume caffeine responsibly and in moderation as part of their daily routines. People are bewildered by confusing medical reports related to coffee. A December 2015 headline reads, "Specific coffee chemicals may ward off type 2 diabetes." And another read, "Moderate coffee drinking may prevent premature death." But, a Mayo Clinic study found that men who drank more than four 8 oz. cups of coffee had a 21% increase in all-cause mortality. Coffee includes more than 1,000 distinct compounds. A new study in the American Heart Association's journal *Circulation* found that people who drank a moderate amount of coffee (fewer than five cups per day) experienced a lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease, neurological diseases, type 2 diabetes and suicide. But, previous results of similar studies have produced inconsistent results in regard to coffee's effects on various illnesses. A 2017 study found a protective effect of drinking moderate quantities of caffeinated coffee (equivalent to approximately 1–2 cups daily) against heart disease incidents. Another study found that drinking just one cup of coffee per day could cut the risk of liver cancer by a fifth (20%). Still, another study found that men who consumed at least three cups of Italian-style coffee every day were at a 53 percent lower risk of developing prostate cancer. They found that the caffeinated coffee extracts reduced the proliferation and growth of cancer cells and decreased their ability to metastasize, or spread. These effects were almost non-existent with decaffeinated coffee extracts.

In the America that I love, we must remember that most of the above so-called scientific evidence has been considered insufficient to draw conclusions or to prove causal relationships. So, in the meantime, enjoy your coffee, but try not go overboard with overall caffeine consumption. Conflicted studies lead to confusion.

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