

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Coffee And Its Benefits and Risks”

Coffee is the leading worldwide beverage after water and its trade exceeds US \$10 billion worldwide. 54% of Americans over the age of 18 drink coffee every day. Americans average 3.1 cups a day and the average size of a cup is 9 oz. Controversies regarding its benefits and risks still exist as reliable evidence is becoming available supporting its health promoting potential; however, some researchers have argued about the association of coffee consumption with cardiovascular complications and cancer uprising. Many, but not all, research investigations have revealed coffee may reduce the risk of diabetes mellitus, liver cancer, melanoma skin cancer, endometrial cancer, erectile dysfunction, various other cancer lines, mild cognitive impairment, Parkinsonism, and Alzheimer's disease. The health-promoting properties of coffee are often attributed to its rich phytochemistry, including caffeine, chlorogenic acid, caffeic acid, hydroxyhydroquinone (HHQ), etc. On the other hand, higher levels of some of these compounds raise serum cholesterol, posing a possible threat to coronary health, for example, myocardial and cerebral infarction (heart attacks and strokes), insomnia, and cardiovascular complications. Caffeine withdrawal is accompanied with muscle fatigue and allied problems in those addicted to coffee. Coffee's caffeine jolt can temporarily boost alertness, perk up performance, and possibly even improve concentration. But caffeine is a drug, and as with any drug, there are right ways and wrong ways to use it. Pregnant women or those with postmenopausal problems should avoid excessive consumption of coffee because of its interference with oral contraceptives or postmenopausal hormones. Add to that tea, caffeinated soft drinks and those infamous energy drinks, and you won't be surprised to read that 90 percent of us consume caffeine in some form or another each day. Caffeine can be worrisome for people with high blood pressure, diabetes and osteoporosis. Plus, caffeine can interact poorly with some common medications, and it can worsen insomnia, anxiety and heartburn. It would make things easier if the caffeine content were listed on food labels to prevent exceeding the 300-mg level that most health experts consider safe. Caffeine is addictive and users can become dependent on it and find it difficult to quit. Caffeine dependence was even named as a new mental disorder this year. Anyone who's ever quit cold turkey knows it can trigger pounding headaches, mental fuzziness and fatigue for a couple of days until the body adjusts. On the up side, a new analysis of over 200 studies found that drinking three to four cups of coffee a day seemingly lowers the risk of death and getting heart disease compared with drinking no coffee.

In the America that I love, keep drinking your coffee in moderation and enjoy, because new studies will not likely remove the confusion any time soon.

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