

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

December 16, 2018

## “Coffee - Pros and Cons”

Over half (55%) of the US population drinks coffee on a daily basis, at an average of about 2 cups per day. The U.S. spends \$40 billion on coffee each year. But, is all this coffee affecting our health? Caffeine and other compounds in coffee have been shown to help you burn more calories, reduce cellular damage, aid in DNA repair, and provide anti-inflammatory effects. Coffee may even lower the risk of certain types of cancer. Yet, the American Academy of Pediatrics says caffeine has been linked to harmful effects on young people's developing neurologic and cardiovascular systems. People are bewildered by confusing medical reports related to coffee. 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. Too much coffee can cause restlessness, wakefulness, and “the jitters.” In addition, too much coffee during pregnancy (more than 4 cups per day) has been linked with preterm births, low birth weights, and stillbirths. Coffee also raises the risk of bone fractures in women. 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. Surprisingly, those reductions may not be due to the caffeine in those magic beans. Coffee drinkers experienced the same beneficial effects whether they sipped full strength or decaf. Drinking coffee raises cholesterol and it significantly contributes to increased levels of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C), and triglycerides. Higher coffee consumption was associated with lower type 2 diabetes risk. Still, a 2017 study found a protective effect of drinking moderate quantities of caffeinated coffee 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% lower risk of developing prostate cancer. Coffee increases risk of bladder cancer and a 2015 meta-analysis, showed that coffee drinkers were 33% more likely to develop bladder cancer than people who didn't drink coffee. Actually, male coffee drinkers and non-smokers with high coffee consumption were even more likely to develop bladder cancer.

In the America that I love, we should enjoyably drink coffee in moderation and not panic at the next so-called “breaking scientific study.” Next year, the news will likely change.

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