

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Ups and Downs of Coffee Consumption”

We love our coffee, but is there a scientific verdict on its health effects? Can it add years to your life? Does it help protect from cardiovascular disease? Should you stop drinking coffee if you're pregnant? 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 or longevity? 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 new study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* found that moderate coffee consumption (3–4 cups per day) was associated with decreased risks of cardiovascular-specific and all-cause mortality. Other researchers found that, in any coffee-drinkers, there was a significant inverse association with the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, endometrial cancer, melanoma, and nonmelanoma skin cancer. Results showed that drinking 3–4 cups of coffee per day provided the best risk reduction for cardiovascular disease. Their analysis confirmed that coffee consumption had beneficial health impacts on longevity. Likewise, an article published in the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)* found that the consumption of 2–5 standard cups of coffee per day was associated with reduced mortality in studies conducted throughout the world and across various demographics. Other recent studies have focused on the relationship between coffee and heart health. Findings indicated that increased coffee consumption was associated with a decreased long-term risk of heart failure. In one of the studies, elderly individuals who consumed any caffeinated coffee had a 43% reduction in cardiovascular-related deaths compared with those who never consumed coffee. Other recent research has arrived at a similar conclusion. However, it has been shown that a sudden intake of caffeine raised epinephrine levels and blood pressure in the short term in those who hadn't previously consumed coffee. But studies involving habitual coffee drinkers have generally reported no substantial impact on blood pressure, even in those with hypertension. Researchers have noted that studies have consistently found that the consumption of up to 6 cups of coffee per day is not associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular outcomes in the general population or in those with hypertension, diabetes, or cardiovascular diseases, when compared with no coffee consumption. While it is becoming increasingly clear that some coffee consumption is beneficial for health, the beverage's benefits in pregnant women remain controversial. Current health advice states that moderate consumption during pregnancy is safe.

In the America that I love, we should enjoy our coffee but next year, the news may likely change.

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