

Coffee as a Health Drink? Studies Find Some Benefits

By NICHOLAS BAKALAR
Published: August 15, 2006

Coffee is not usually thought of as health food, but a number of recent studies suggest that it can be a highly beneficial drink. Researchers have found strong evidence that coffee reduces the risk of several serious ailments, including [diabetes](#), [heart disease](#) and cirrhosis of the liver.

Related Web Links

- [Coffee Consumption and Risk of Type 2 Diabetes \(JAMA\)](#)
- [Consumption of Coffee is Associated With Reduced Risk of Death Attributed to Inflammatory and Cardiovascular Diseases in the Iowa Women's Health Study \(American Journal of Clinical Nutrition\)](#)
- [Content of Redox-Active Compounds \(ie, antioxidants\) in Foods Consumed in the United States \(American Journal of Clinical Nutrition\)](#)
- [Coffee, Cirrhosis, and Transaminase Enzymes \(Archives of Internal Medicine\)](#)
- [Caffeine Decreases Exercise-Induced Myocardial Flow Reserve \(Journal of the American College of Cardiology\)](#)

Among them is a systematic [review](#) of studies published last year in The Journal of the [American Medical Association](#), which concluded that habitual coffee consumption was consistently associated with a lower risk of Type 2 diabetes. Exactly why is not known, but the authors offered several explanations.

Coffee contains antioxidants that help control the cell damage that can contribute to the development of the disease. It is also a source of chlorogenic acid, which has been shown in animal experiments to reduce glucose concentrations.

Caffeine, perhaps coffee's most famous component, seems to have little to do with it; studies that looked at decaffeinated coffee alone found the same degree of risk reduction.

Larger quantities of coffee seem to be especially helpful in diabetes prevention. In a report that combined statistical data from many studies, researchers found that people who drank four to six cups of coffee a day had a 28 percent reduced risk compared with people who drank two or fewer. Those who

drank more than six had a 35 percent risk reduction.

Some studies show that cardiovascular risk also decreases with coffee consumption. Using data on more than 27,000 women ages 55 to 69 in the Iowa Women's Health Study who were followed for 15 years, Norwegian researchers found that women who drank one to three cups a day reduced their risk of cardiovascular disease by 24 percent compared with those drinking no coffee at all.

But as the quantity increased, the benefit decreased. At more than six cups a day, the risk was not significantly reduced. Still, after controlling for age, [smoking](#) and alcohol consumption, women who drank one to five cups a day — caffeinated or decaffeinated — reduced their risk of death from all causes during the study by 15 to 19 percent compared with those who drank none.

The [findings](#), which appeared in May in The American Journal of Clinical [Nutrition](#), suggest that antioxidants in coffee may dampen inflammation, reducing the risk of disorders related to it, like cardiovascular disease. Several compounds in coffee may contribute to its antioxidant capacity, including phenols, volatile aroma compounds and oxazoles that are efficiently absorbed.

In another [analysis](#), published in July in the same journal, researchers found that a typical serving of coffee contains more antioxidants than typical servings of grape juice, blueberries, raspberries and oranges.


"We were surprised to learn that coffee quantitatively is the major contributor of antioxidants in the

-  MAIL
-  PRINT
-  REPRINTS
-  SAVE

[Next Article in Health \(4 of 12\) »](#)

MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. [Coffee as a Health Drink? Studies Find Some Benefits](#)
2. [Elusive Proof, Elusive Prover: A New Mathematical Mystery](#)
3. [For Now, Pluto Holds Its Place in Solar System](#)
4.  [THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN: Big Talk, Little Will](#)
5. [Dell Will Recall Batteries in PC's](#)
6. [Editorial Observer: Has Bush v. Gore Become the Case That Must Not Be Named?](#)
7. [A Food Web Site, Spiced With Attitude](#)
8. [The Frugal Traveler: In San Francisco and Almost Home](#)
9. [The Overview: Hezbollah Leads Work to Rebuild, Gaining Stature](#)
10. [For SAT Maker, a Broader Push to the Classroom](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)

Real Estate
nytimes.com/realstate

[Get started with our new Home Finance Center](#)

Also in Real Estate:

- [Which mortgage is right for you?](#)
- [Tips on refinancing your home](#)
- [What you need to know before investing in real estate](#)



Milk Inspection NYC Department of Health,
Circa 1905
[Buy Now](#)

diet both in Norway and in the U.S.A.," said Rune Blomhoff, the senior author of both studies and a professor of nutrition at the University of Oslo.

These same anti-inflammatory properties may explain why coffee appears to decrease the risk of alcohol-related cirrhosis and liver [cancer](#). This effect was first observed in 1992. [Recent studies](#), published in June in The Archives of Internal Medicine, confirmed the finding.

Still, some experts believe that coffee drinking, and particularly caffeine consumption, can have negative health consequences. A [study](#) published in January in The Journal of the American College of Cardiology, for example, suggests that the amount of caffeine in two cups of coffee significantly decreases blood flow to the heart, particularly during exercise at high altitude.

Rob van Dam, a [Harvard](#) scientist and the lead author of The Journal of the American Medical Association review, acknowledged that caffeine could increase [blood pressure](#) and slightly increase levels of the amino acid homocysteine, possibly raising the risk for heart disease.

"I wouldn't advise people to increase their consumption of coffee in order to lower their risk of disease," Dr. van Dam said, "but the evidence is that for most people without specific conditions, coffee is not detrimental to health. If people enjoy drinking it, it's comforting to know that they don't have to be afraid of negative health effects."

[Next Article in Health \(4 of 12\) »](#)

[Need to know more? 50% off home delivery of The Times.](#)

Related Articles

- [VITAL SIGNS: REACTIONS: Applying Math and Counting the Cups \(March 14, 2006\)](#)
- [THE MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING: Philips widens its product range and wants consumers to know. \(September 17, 2004\)](#)
- [OBSERVATORY \(August 17, 2004\)](#)
- [Jittery? Peevish? Can't Sleep? What Are You Drinking? \(April 6, 2004\)](#)

Related Searches

- [Coffee](#)
- [Medicine and Health](#)
- [Diabetes](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



[U.S. »](#)

TimesSelect



State Fairs at a Crossroads



Coupland: Sept. 11 Photo Diary

TimesSelect

C Summer in the City

Thomas Beller on the closing of a SoHo restaurant and efforts to keep Wal-Mart out of the Bronx.

[N.Y. / REGION »](#)



Memorizing the Way to Heaven, Verse by Verse

[DINING & WINE »](#)



The Pour: Zin Oasis in Mexico's Dusty Hills

[ARTS »](#)



TV Review: 'Laguna Beach' Season 3

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Automobiles](#) | [Back to Top](#)

Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)