

Can Coffee Really Be Good For Us?

Coffee is very widely consumed, second only to water in some countries. It's a complex beverage containing many biologically active compounds in varying proportions.

This leads to big differences in individual types of coffee. Further variations come from the way our coffee is prepared (roasting, grinding, extraction) and what's mixed with the basic extract before we consume it.

It's not surprising that the effects of coffee intake seem to vary a lot between individuals. It may be more due to coffee variation rather than personal differences.

Large studies are needed to tease out the underlying effect of coffee itself. This update is based on large studies from Europe, USA and Japan – with a recent Australian study for an extra boost!

The good news

Consumption of coffee is associated with increasing longevity, because it is associated with a lower risk of death from a variety of causes. Our digestive, respiratory, circulatory and neurological systems may each get some benefits. The latest Australian study suggested that just an extra cup a day can reduce the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's disease.

Women benefit somewhat more than men. Older people tend to benefit less than younger.

The caffeine in coffee is a significant factor but not the only one. There are benefits from both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee. There are many theories but not enough definitive answers to be sure about reasons.

The research consensus supports moderate daily coffee usage, with a suggested range of 2-4 serves, above which benefits may be moderated by the impact of caffeine, levels of which vary widely between brews. Its impact can include anxiety, insomnia, tremulousness, and palpitations

With coffee already being so widely used in Australia, it may even have contributed to a slight increase in the national longevity averages!

As well as enjoying the flavour and welcoming the social engagement that often accompanies a coffee break, we get immediate benefits through maintaining our alertness.

Because coffee is so variable, one solution to finding your own optimum consumption seems to lie in sticking to one supplier if you want to go above the suggested range. Then keep an eye on how your sense of wellbeing is affected.

What about me?

The bottom line on coffee, for those who enjoy the brew, is that it is a wonderful beverage with few associated disadvantages and plenty to recommend it.

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