

Coffee may be able to lengthen your life and lower your risk of depression



(Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

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The headlines about coffee's impact on your health seem to change as quickly as the time it takes to drink a cup. Should you savor every drop or try to cut down? Here's what we know right now:

It may lengthen your life.

True, coffee drinkers are more likely than nondrinkers to smoke, eat red meat, skimp on exercise and have other life-shortening habits, according to a large 2012 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

But even after adjusting for such factors, they found that people age 50 to 71 who drank at least one cup of coffee per day had a lower risk than nondrinkers of dying from diabetes, heart disease or other health problems when followed for more than a decade. That may be due to beneficial compounds in coffee such as antioxidants — which might ward off disease — and not caffeine. Decaf drinkers had the same results.

It may make you happier.

Coffee is not just a pick-me-up; it also has been linked to a lower risk of depression. In a study led by the Harvard

School of Public Health that tracked 50,000 women for 10 years, those who drank four or more cups of caffeinated coffee per day were 20 percent less likely to develop depression than nondrinkers. Another study found that adults who drank two to four cups of caffeinated coffee were about half as likely to attempt suicide as decaf drinkers or abstainers. The researchers speculated that long-term coffee drinking may boost the production of “feel good” hormones such as dopamine.

It contains many good-for-you chemicals.

For most Americans who drink coffee, it provides more antioxidants than any other food, according to Joe Vinson, a chemistry professor at the University of Scranton. But it’s also a top source of acrylamide, a chemical whose link to cancer is being investigated.

It may cut your risk for Type 2 diabetes.

A recent Harvard-led study of more than 120,000 men and women found that those who increased the amount of caffeinated coffee they drank per day by more than one eight-ounce cup, on average, were 11 percent less likely to develop Type 2 diabetes than those whose coffee habits stayed the same. And those who decreased their daily intake by at least a cup per day, on average, were 17 percent more likely to develop the disease.

The method matters.

Cafestol, a compound in coffee grounds, has been found to increase levels of LDL, or “bad,” cholesterol. Brewing with a paper filter helps remove the substance. Coffee made other ways, including French press and espresso, has higher levels of cafestol.

It’s not for everyone.

More than 500 milligrams (about four to five cups) of brewed coffee per day can cause side effects including insomnia, irritability and restlessness, says registered dietitian Maxine Siegel, manager of product usability and foods at Consumer Reports. Caffeine stimulates the central nervous system, heart and muscles. So if you have an anxiety disorder, irritable bowel syndrome or heart disease, or if you take certain medications, watch your consumption or opt for decaf. And if you have acid reflux, you might want to skip coffee altogether because the acidity could exacerbate it.

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