

# 5 health benefits of coffee

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## For starters, it might help you live longer

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The headlines about the health benefits of coffee seem to change as quickly as the time it takes to drink a cup. Is coffee good for you? Here's what we know now:

Wash that work mug! One study found 90 percent of office cups harbored germs.

### 1. It may help you live longer.

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 2012 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. But when researchers took those factors into account, they found that people ages 50 to 71 who drank at least one cup of [coffee](#) per day lowered their risk of dying from diabetes, [heart disease](#), or other health problems when followed for more than a decade. That may be due to beneficial compounds such as [antioxidants](#)—which might ward off disease—and not caffeine. Decaf drinkers had the same results.



### 2. It may perk you up.

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.

**Coffee isn't the only drink that can keep you healthy. [Tea](#), [hot chocolate](#), or even a [hot toddy](#) can pack a nutritional punch.**

### 3. 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, Ph.D., 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.

#### 4. 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 8-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.

But nix the doughnut with your morning cup; excess sugar might cancel out any benefit you might get from a balanced blood sugar level. And watch how much sugar and cream you add to your java—overdo it and you have a [calorie- and fat-packed beverage](#).

#### 5. Most people don't have to worry about the caffeine.

Data suggest that most healthy adults can safely consume, daily, up to 400 milligrams of [caffeine](#)—the amount in around two to four cups of brewed coffee. (Exact amounts vary a lot, though.) Pregnant women should keep it to less than 200 milligrams; kids, no more than 45 to 85 milligrams. More than that can cause side effects including insomnia, irritability, and restlessness. 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.

—*Rachel Meltzer Warren*

**Editor's Note:** This article also appeared in the December 2014 issue of [Consumer Reports on Health](#).

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