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Just THREE cups of coffee a day could slash risk of Alzheimer's, study finds

DRINKING three to five cups of coffee a day could help to significantly lower the risk of suffering Alzheimer's disease, according to the latest research.



VETTA/TAXI

Drinking coffee could lower your chance of getting the disease by up to 20 per cent

Scientists have discovered a link between regular daily intake of the hot drink and a reduction of up to 20 per cent of the chances of developing dementia.

The report released today (thurs) from the Institute for Scientific Information on Coffee highlights the role nutrition can play in preserving cognitive function, especially during the preclinical phase of Alzheimer's before full-blown symptoms of dementia occur.

It notes that a Mediterranean diet, consisting of fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, olive oil and red wine, has already been associated with a reduced risk for development of Alzheimer's Disease.

But it adds that the latest research now suggests that compounds called polyphenols and caffeine can also be responsible for this protective effect - and these exact compounds are also found in high quantities in coffee.

It shows that regular, life-long moderate coffee consumption was associated with a reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease with the body of evidence suggesting that coffee drinkers can reduce their risk of developing the disease.

Dr Arfran Ikram, an assistant professor in neuroepidemiology at Erasmus Medical Centre Rotterdam, who contributed to the report's findings, said: "The majority of human epidemiological studies suggest that regular coffee consumption over a lifetime is associated with a reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease, with an optimum protective effect occurring with three to five cups of coffee per day."

The details within the report were originally presented at the Alzheimer Europe annual conference in Glasgow last month and the Institute has released its final conclusions today (thurs).

The conference heard that moderate coffee consumption was associated with a lower risk of developing dementia over a four year test period - by up to 20 per cent. However the effect diminished over a longer follow up period.

The researchers found caffeine helped prevent the formation of amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles in the brain - two hallmarks of Alzheimer's Disease.

In addition to this, both caffeine and polyphenols reduced inflammation and decreased the deterioration of brain cells - especially in the hippocampus and cortex, areas of the brain involved in memory.

Dr Iva Holmerova, vice chairman of Alzheimer Europe, said: "The findings presented in this report are very encouraging and help to develop our understanding of the role nutrition can play in protecting against Alzheimer's Disease. Coffee is a very popular beverage enjoyed by millions of people around the world and I'm pleased to know that moderate, lifelong consumption can have a beneficial effect on the development of Alzheimer's Disease."

She added: "Cognitive decline is a feature of aging, and although some changes can be expected in all of us, there is some evidence that diet and lifestyle may be related to cognition. In fact epidemiological studies suggest that certain lifestyle factors and nutritional elements, including the consumption of coffee and caffeine, may help to slow age-related cognitive decline seen in the older generation."

But Jess Smith, Research Officer at the care and research charity Alzheimer's Society, warned that the evidence that drinking coffee will help to protect against Alzheimer's disease was still not conclusive.

She added: "Some research suggests that caffeine and antioxidants in coffee may be beneficial but studies in people show mixed results - more research and clinical trials are needed to see if positive effects occur in people over the long term.

"There is no single way to reduce your risk of dementia. Exercising frequently, as well as eating a healthy balanced diet, avoiding smoking, not drinking in excess, and managing other health conditions can play a role in reducing your risk of dementia."

The symptoms of dementia may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language.

It is caused when the brain is damaged by diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease or a series of strokes. Dementia is progressive, which means the symptoms will gradually get worse.

Alzheimer's Disease affects one person in 20 over the age of 65, amounting to 26 million people world-wide. The number of people in Europe aged over 65 is predicted to rise from 15.4 per cent of the population to 22.4per cent by 2025 and, with an ageing population, neuro-degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's are of increasing concern.

In the UK, some 850,000 are affected by dementia, costing the nation an estimated £26.3billion a year. Of the 850,000, some 60 per cent have Alzheimer's disease.

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Dr Arfran Ikram

