



coffee&health

from the institute for scientific information on coffee



Fact or Fiction



Coffee is one of the most widely researched food items in the world. Overall, the large and growing body of scientific research shows that coffee, when drunk in moderation i.e. 3-4 regular cups a day, is perfectly safe for the majority of healthy adults.

However, there are still many misconceptions about coffee and health which can lead to confusion about whether coffee consumption can be enjoyed as part of a healthy, balanced diet. You may come across these in your daily practice as your patients or colleagues ask you for advice.

Based on the latest scientific research, this document, which has been developed for health care and other professional audiences, serves as a quick-reference guide to respond to some of the most frequently asked questions about coffee and health.

Drinking coffee is bad for health

Drinking coffee does not increase the risk of cardiovascular disease

Pregnant women should stop drinking coffee

Drinking coffee helps improve sports performance

Coffee is dehydrating

Drinking coffee keeps me alert and helps me concentrate

Coffee can become addictive

Drinking coffee in the afternoon or evening does not always disrupt sleep

Decaffeinated coffee is healthier than regular coffee

Drinking coffee is bad for health

FICTION

- Regular coffee drinking can be part of a healthy, balanced diet and lifestyle, and moderate coffee consumption i.e. 3-4 regular cups a day, is safe for most individuals with no adverse effects
- Scientific evidence also suggests that moderate coffee consumption may actually offer a number of benefits. For example, the European Food Safety Authority recently stated that caffeine improves both sports performance (endurance exercise) and increases attention and alertness ^(1,2)
- However some individuals may choose to switch to decaffeinated coffee e.g. pregnant women, those sensitive to the stimulant effects of caffeine late afternoon/early evening. For these individuals, decaffeinated coffee provides an alternative so they can still enjoy the taste and aroma of coffee



Drinking coffee does not increase the risk of cardiovascular disease

FACT

- Moderate coffee consumption is not linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular problems such as heart disease, heart attacks, irregular heart beat or high blood pressure ^(3,4)
- Research also suggests that, in both men and women, drinking coffee in moderation may reduce their risk of stroke, but no firm conclusion has yet been drawn ⁽⁵⁾
- Coffee's effect on cholesterol levels is largely dependent on the method of brewing. Filtered coffee is not associated with a significant increase in cholesterol levels, while boiled coffee can raise cholesterol levels ⁽⁶⁾

Pregnant women should stop drinking coffee

FICTION

- Studies from the last decade clearly report that moderate caffeine consumption, including that from coffee, is not a matter of concern for a healthy pregnancy ⁽⁷⁾. Pregnant women can still enjoy a couple of cups of regular coffee a day
- Health authorities recommend that pregnant women should limit their daily caffeine intake to 200-300mg from all sources ⁽⁸⁾. A regular cup of caffeinated coffee contains approximately 80-100mg of caffeine
- Overall, well-conducted scientific studies in humans have shown no adverse effects on the fetus if a pregnant woman consumes a moderate amount of caffeine from coffee or other caffeinated beverages

Drinking coffee helps improve sports performance

FACT

- The effects of coffee consumption on sports performance are linked to the caffeine in coffee, rather than to coffee itself
- The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) recently stated that a cause and effect relationship has been established for caffeine intake and increased endurance performance, endurance capacity, and a reduction in perceived exertion ⁽¹⁾. Caffeine is effective at doses of 3-4mg/kg
- Caffeine may moderate central fatigue and influence ratings of perceived exertion, pain and levels of vigour, all of which are likely to lead to improvements in performance ⁽⁹⁾



Coffee is dehydrating

FICTION

- While there is some indication of a mild, short-term diuretic effect of caffeine, this effect is not strong enough to counter-balance the benefits of fluid intake from coffee drinking
- Scientific evidence looking at the effects of caffeine on fluid balance does not support a significant diuretic effect of caffeine ⁽¹¹⁾
- Coffee drinking in moderation contributes to our daily fluid intake and does not lead to dehydration, or significant loss of body fluid ⁽¹²⁾

Drinking coffee keeps me alert and helps me concentrate

FACT

- The caffeine in coffee is well known for its stimulating effects, which have scientifically proven benefits on mental performance
- The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) recently stated that a 75mg serving of caffeine (the amount found in approximately one regular cup of coffee) increases both attention and alertness ⁽²⁾
- The stimulant effects of a regular cup of coffee are observed between 15 – 45 minutes after consumption and normally last for about four hours ⁽¹⁰⁾

Coffee can become addictive

FICTION

- While caffeine in coffee is a mild central nervous system stimulant, recent scientific studies using brain scans suggest that moderate coffee drinkers do not develop a physical dependence to caffeine ^(13,14,15)
- Some studies suggest that removing caffeine from the diet suddenly may lead to mild, temporary withdrawal symptoms, like headache, in some individuals. These symptoms can be avoided by a gradual reduction of caffeine intake from the diet over time ⁽¹⁶⁾
- It is likely that people continue to drink coffee because they enjoy its taste and aroma, and recognise it as a behavioural stimulant; and not because of any addictive qualities of caffeine



Drinking coffee in the afternoon or evening does not always disrupt sleep

FACT

- Some people who are sensitive to caffeine find that the mild stimulation of coffee, consumed late in the afternoon or shortly before going to bed, may delay the time it takes them to fall asleep and/or affects their sleep overall. Other people consume caffeinated drinks during the evening and have no problems falling asleep
- Anyone who is sensitive to the stimulant effects of caffeine can enjoy decaffeinated coffee during the afternoon and evening instead ⁽¹⁷⁾
- It should be noted that there are many other factors, including noise, temperature, and discomfort, that may affect how long it takes someone to get to sleep ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Decaffeinated coffee is healthier than regular coffee

FICTION

- There are some circumstances when individuals may be advised to, or choose to, switch to decaffeinated coffee. Pregnant women, for example, are advised to limit their caffeine intake to 200mg - 300mg per day ⁽⁸⁾ and also those very sensitive to caffeine. For those individuals, decaffeinated coffee provides an alternative so they can still enjoy the taste and aroma of coffee
- In addition, some people find that the mild stimulant effect of caffeine consumed late in the afternoon or shortly before going to bed affects their sleep. In their case, it is well advised to switch to decaffeinated coffee during the afternoon and evening ⁽¹⁷⁾
- In other cases, drinking caffeinated coffee has actually been shown to have some health benefits. For example, the European Food Safety Authority recently stated that caffeine improves both sports performance (endurance exercise) and increases attention and alertness ^(1,2)

For more information, please visit www.coffeeandhealth.org

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