

Questions patients ask

Q: Is coffee good for the liver?

A: Research suggests that regular, moderate coffee consumption can lower people's risk of developing a range of liver diseases – including cancer, fibrosis (scar tissue that builds up within the liver) and cirrhosis (the result of a long-term build up of scar tissue within the liver).

Q: How many cups of coffee do I need to drink to see a benefit?

A: It is too early to make specific recommendations concerning the levels of coffee intake that may be beneficial for liver function. Research suggests that regular, moderate coffee consumption may be beneficial^{1,2}. However certain patients with specific conditions may need to limit their caffeine consumption. For example, pregnant women are advised to limit their caffeine intake to 200-300mg per day – the equivalent amount found in 2-3 regular cups of coffee.

Q: Are the benefits of coffee down to caffeine?

A: While research has suggested that caffeine may slow down the progression of liver fibrosis, alcoholic cirrhosis and liver cancer^{3,4,5}, the extent to which caffeine is implicated in the reduced risk of developing these diseases remains unclear. Research also suggests that other coffee constituents, including cafestol and kahweol⁶ (naturally occurring compounds found in the oily part of coffee), and antioxidants may have a beneficial effect on liver function.

Q: Is decaffeinated coffee as good as regular coffee?

A: Research suggests that caffeine might play a role in the relationship between coffee drinking and lower risk of liver disease; however, currently there are no published studies specifically investigating the effects of decaffeinated coffee on liver function.

Q: If I'm a coffee drinker, can I drink more alcohol without increasing my risk of liver disease?

A: No. All medical advice makes clear that excessive alcohol consumption is detrimental to health. Adults, who choose to consume alcohol, should be aware of the recommended advice for safe consumption. While scientific research suggests that coffee drinking may have a beneficial effect on liver function, the risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption are not counter balanced by coffee consumption.

Q: I've heard that the effects of alcohol on the liver can be different for women than for men. Is the same true for coffee?

A: Generally, the effect of coffee drinking does not differ between the sexes; however, some groups, such as pregnant women, smokers, or women taking hormone replacement therapy do metabolise caffeine at a different rate to those in the general population. Pregnant women are advised to limit their caffeine intake to 200-300mg per day – the equivalent amount found in 2-3 regular cups of coffee.

Q: Do all types of coffee have the same effect?

A: Studies investigating the relationship between coffee and liver function have demonstrated beneficial effects in various types of coffee preparation, including filtered, instant and espresso coffee.

Q: Is it safe for individuals with liver disease to drink coffee?

A: Yes, there is no evidence to suggest that moderate coffee drinking poses any dangers for individuals with liver disease. In fact, some studies suggest coffee may slow down the progression of liver disease in some patients.

Q: Does coffee have any benefits for individuals with liver disease?

A: Research has shown that individuals with liver disease who regularly drink moderate amounts of coffee tend to display a milder progression of the disease^{7,8}.



References

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- 5 Gressner O.A. (2009), Less Smad2 is good for you? A scientific update on coffee's liver benefits. *Hepatology*, 50:970-978.
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