Coffee and Cardiovascular Health

Questions patients ask

Q: Is coffee bad for the heart?

A: No, research shows that drinking coffee is not associated with the development of cardiovascular problems, including heart disease, heart attacks, irregular heart beat or high blood pressure.

Q: Is coffee safe for people with heart problems?

A: Moderate coffee consumption of 3 – 4 cups a day is safe for many patients with heart disease. Anybody with concerns about their heart health should seek advice from their doctor.

Q. Should I stop drinking coffee to keep my heart healthy?

A: There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that giving up coffee has any direct benefits on general heart health. People who have concerns about their heart health should consult their doctor.

Q. Can coffee be good for the heart?

A: Some research has found that, in women, coffee consumption can reduce the risk of stroke[1]. But it's still early days and no firm conclusion can be drawn at this stage.

Q: Can drinking coffee increase blood pressure?

A: The effect of coffee consumption on blood pressure is relatively small and drinking coffee is generally not considered to be an important risk factor for raised blood pressure.

Q: I've heard that caffeine increases blood pressure. Is this true?

A: Caffeine has been shown to raise blood pressure in the short term. However, research has suggested that in people who regularly drink coffee, more factors are involved than just caffeine, and some of them seem to have opposite effects. Many other substances in coffee, such as antioxidants, soluble fibre and potassium, could have a beneficial effect on blood pressure.

Q: I've heard that people who drink coffee have higher cholesterol levels than those who do not. Is this true?

A: Drinking filtered coffee has not been linked to significant increases in cholesterol levels. However, the consumption of unfiltered coffee has been shown to increase blood levels of both total and LDL cholesterol. This is because the cholesterol-raising compounds in coffee are retained in the paper filter in filtered coffee[2].

Q: Are there any other brewing methods that have the same effect?

A: Scandinavian boiled coffee, Cafetière (plunger pot), Greek and Turkish coffee contain cholesterol-raising components cafestol and kahweol in higher amounts. Consuming substantial amounts of these types of coffee can raise serum cholesterol levels. The effects on cholesterol levels are transient and are reduced after the cessation of consumption.

Q: Are the cholesterol-raising components found in all coffees?

A: The coffee components thought to be responsible for increasing cholesterol are cafestol and kahweol. These are naturally-occurring compounds found in the oily part of coffee. They are found in varying amounts depending on the type of coffee. For example, filtered coffee contains very little as they are retained in the paper filter[2]. In contrast, Scandinavian boiled coffee, Cafetière (or plunger pot), Greek and Turkish coffee contain higher levels of these compounds. Soluble coffee contains hardly any of the cholesterol-raising compounds, whilst espresso contains roughly half the amount of unfiltered coffee and, as it is served in small quantities, a moderate consumption of espresso coffee can be expected to have negligible effect on serum cholesterol levels.

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References

1 Lopez-Garcia E. et al. (2009) Coffee consumption and risk of stroke in women. *Circulation*, 119:1116-1123.

2 Jee S.H. et al. (2001) Coffee consumption and serum lipids: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled clinical trials. *Am J Epidemiol*, 153:353-362.

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