You've probably heard recently that drinking a cup of coffee each morning has health benefits. Is this true?
Questions have been raised concerning the effects of caffeine and the possible health risks associated with it. Some state that caffeine is beneficial whereas others state that it is harmful to the human body. So what are the claims of those for and against caffeine, and are they substantiated?
Caffeine is vastly popular in today's society. Found in various products such as coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate, and even certain medications, it is widely consumed by people of all ages. An article from the Journal of Women's Health (2010) states that men and women aged 35 to 64 yrs are among the highest consumers of caffeine, with an average intake of 250 mg/day (about 3 cups of brewed coffee).

Questions have been raised concerning the effects of caffeine and the possible health risks associated with it. Some state that caffeine is beneficial whereas others state that it is harmful to the human body. Let's take a look at some of the claims made on both sides to see the conclusion of the matter.

Let's first take a look at just 3 of the popular claims pertaining to the “benefits” of coffee.

**Pro-caffeine**

1) You may have heard the claim that drinking coffee is beneficial to the body. Well, it turns out that these benefits are due to the antioxidants found in the coffee beans (therefore in the coffee) rather than the caffeine. Fruits, vegetables, and herbs are loaded with disease fighting nutrients such as antioxidants. However, not all edible plants are completely beneficial to the body because some also contain substances that give our body a hard time. So, why bother taking in the bad stuff along with the good stuff to rob yourself of all the benefits that you could experience?

2) You may have heard of coffee being the “number one source of antioxidants” according to popular media and various websites.

Let’s take a look at the context of where this claim was derived from.


Now, if you carefully consider this study, it doesn’t really prove anything, because “most Americans have a diet that is devoid of antioxidant rich fruits and vegetables. Therefore, any food that has any amount of antioxidants that is eaten more than 1-2 times a day would rank fairly high on the list.” (Gianni, 2011)

3) You may have also heard of the claim that regular caffeine users develop a tolerance for it and therefore doesn’t count as being of concern. Well, according to the study mentioned in the article, Caffeine and Blood Pressure Response: Sex, Age, and Hormonal Status (Journal of Women’s Health 2010), it states the following:
Despite the popular belief that tolerance occurs with habitual consumption, numerous studies have demonstrated that tolerance to caffeine’s pressor effects is incomplete following daily structured intake. Persistent increases in BP accompany caffeine ingestion, despite daily caffeine consumption in a large portion of caffeine consumers.

**Anti-caffeine**

Let’s now take a look at just 3 of the main health concerns that caffeine brings.

These are mentioned in Dr. Nedley’s book, *Proof Positive: How to Reliably Combat Disease and Achieve Optimal Health through Nutrition and Lifestyle*:

1) **Caffeine Impairs the Brain**

- Tends to produce dependence
- Can cause drug withdrawal reactions
- Can cause or worsen psychiatric illnesses
- Impairs physical and mental performance
- Interferes with sleep
- May influence the risk of other illnesses that in turn exert frontal lobe effects through physical or mental stress
- May exert effects that impact on spiritual and social dimensions of our character
- Can cause toxicity and even death

2) **Has Mutagenic Effects**

The following is mentioned in *IARC Monograph Volume 51*:

“In cultured mammalian cells, methylglyoxal induced mutations, sister chromatid exchange and (on the basis of alkaline elution and sensitivity to proteinase K) reparable DNA-protein cross-links (Brambila et al., 1985).”


3) **Decreases Stress Management Ability and Increases Depression**

The Norwegian Research Project (Tromso Heart Study) study involving 143,000 people revealed that women who heavily drink coffee experienced a significant increase in depression and decrease in coping with stress. (Proof Positive, 1999) It is stated by the Anxiety and Depression Association of America that major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability in the U.S.

**So What’s the Solution?**

After taking these medical studies into consideration, we find our best conclusion in one of the eight laws of health, Temperance, which states the total abstinence from substances that are harmful and a moderate use of substances that are helpful. From looking at both sides of the issue, it appears that we’re better off without caffeine. Another take-away from this subject is that we must be careful not to accept any claim made by the media. Although there is some truth to what they say, they don’t prove themselves to be completely accurate either.
References:


