

Coffee's Jolt to Your Health

Ah, the morning cup of coffee. It shakes away our sleep and readies us for the day's challenges. Many health professionals say it also may have many health advantages.

Coffee may provide protection against Parkinson's disease, type 2 diabetes and liver disease. It also appears to improve cognitive function and decrease the risk of depression, according to the Mayo Clinic.



WHY THE TURN-AROUND?

Coffee hasn't always been the apple of the medical community's eye. In fact, it has a long history of being blamed for many negative health issues ranging from stunting growth to causing cancer.

But a closer look at its impact on the body has found an association between coffee consumption and decreased overall mortality. Why the apparent change of tone?

Earlier studies sometimes didn't incorporate the fact that known high-risk behaviors, such as smoking and physical inactivity, tended to be more common among heavy coffee drinkers at that time.

POSSIBLE RISKS

The research does, however, appear to bear out some risks. High consumption of unfiltered coffee (boiled or espresso) has been associated with mild elevations in cholesterol

levels.

What we add to our coffee also can negate the positive impacts of our favorite java. Some coffee drinks contain more than 500 calories, thanks to a few splashes of cream and sugar. And some studies have found that two or more cups of coffee a day can increase the risk of heart disease in people with a specific genetic mutation that slows the breakdown of caffeine.

SMART TIPS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers these tips for your trip to the coffee shop:

- If you take milk in your coffee, request that your drink be made with fat-free or lowfat milk.
- Order the smallest size available – especially if you add milk and sugar to your drink.
- Avoid sugar-heavy flavored syrups.
- Plain, black coffee is the healthiest option.