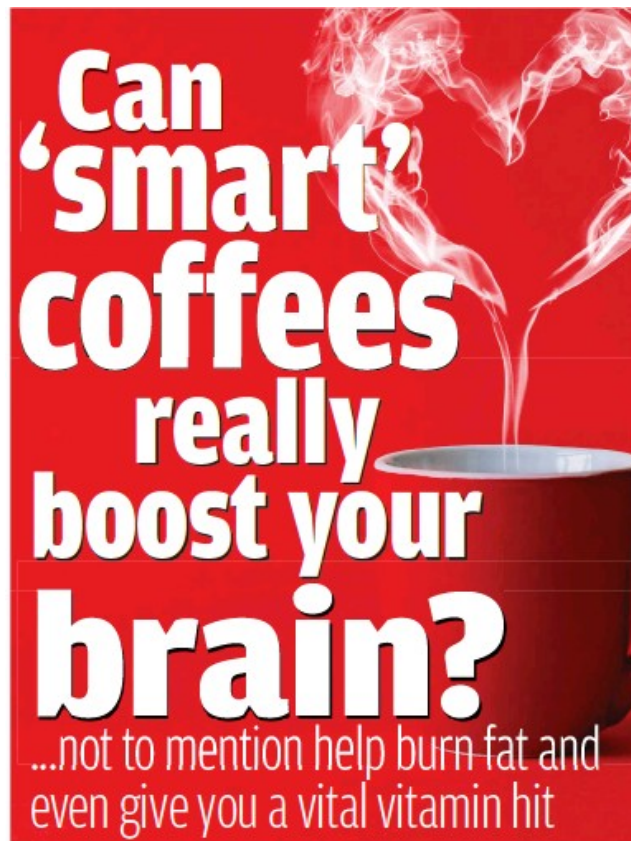


Can 'smart' coffees really boost your brain?

...not to mention help burn fat and even give you a vital vitamin hit

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BEYOND the welcome caffeine lift, research shows that regularly drinking coffee may help you live longer, thanks to its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. But now manufacturers are 'pimping up' coffee with everything from added vitamins to brain boosters. ANGELA DOWDEN asked dietitians Noor Al-Refae, based in Doncaster, S. Yorks, and Helen Bond, from Derbyshire, to assess a selection; we then rated them.



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ANTI-INFLAMMATORY

Vahdam Superfoods turmeric coffee, £9.99 for ten single-serve e-serve sachets, amazon.co.uk CLAIM: This his contains 'active' turmeric, c, making it a 'healthier r solution for your daily caffeine needs', the he maker says. Turmeric has 'antitory 'antiinflam-matory properties' as well as being a 'powerful antioxidant [that] lowers risk of heart dis-ease'. ease'. EXPERT VERDICT: ERDICT: 'There's some preliminary research that suggests turmeric, or more accurately ly its active ingredient curcumin, might have ve anti-inflam-matory effects — for example, helping to ease knee pain in people with osteoarthritis,' oarthritis,' says Helen Bond.

'However, er there's no good evidence that turmeric prevents heart disease. Also, most studies use concentrated extracts containing up to 95 per cent curcumin. This just states

125mg turmeric which would deliver curcumin levels far below those used in clinical trials for arthritis.

'That's not to say there aren't more general health benefits — in a small Newcastle University study carried out for a BBC series, 5g, or 1 tsp, of turmeric powder daily was enough to change the activity of the gene SLC6A15, associated with lower risk of depression, asthma, eczema and cancer. But this is expensive — you could just add turmeric powder to standard coffee.' 6/10

WEIGHT-LOSS SUPPORT

Skinny Coffee Club Instant Edition, £27.95 for 28-day supply (52g), hollandandbarrett.com CLAIM: This contains coffee; 'green' coffee (from raw, unroasted beans) with green tea extract; garcinia cambogia (from a tropical fruit native to Indonesia); Siberian ginseng (a herb) and spirulina (an algae). The maker says it is 'an innovation in weight loss'.

you drink a cup a day, and follow a four-week diet. Most instant coffee has around 100mg caffeine per cup, but this has 64mg. EXPERT VERDICT: 'Studies suggest that green tea extract boosts metabolism, but none has shown convincing weight loss caused by taking it,' says noor Al-Refae. 'Green coffee has also been overhyped, and a 2012 study that initially claimed substantial weight loss was retracted due to inaccuracies.'

'Garcinia cambogia contains hydroxycitric acid, which animal studies show increases serotonin, in turn potentially reducing appetite. However, an analysis of trials in the Journal of obesity in 2011 revealed only a small reduction in weight using garcinia cambogia compared to a placebo.'

'Siberian ginseng and spirulina are traditionally used to increase energy levels, but this is unlikely to contain enough. If you lost weight using this coffee it's because you're also eating less.' 3/10

WORK AID

Black Insomnia Whole Beans, £14.99 for 453g, blackinsomnia.co.uk CLAIM: Billed as 'the world's strongest coffee', this contains a massive 1,105mg caffeine per 350ml cup (compared with 140mg in standard coffee). It's made with arabica and robusta coffee beans, which are bred to be high in the stimulant.

It's 'for the grafters, the early starters, the workaholics and the ones who go the extra mile', the maker says. EXPERT VERDICT: 'The claims may be tongue-in-cheek, but this dose of caffeine in one go is no joke — 1,105mg is equivalent to 14 cans of Red Bull or eight mugs of filter coffee,' says noor Al-Refae.

'It'll keep you awake into the night, but could also cause palpitations and make you feel anxious, depending on your sensitivity to caffeine. It does this by preventing the action of adenosine in the body, which normally promotes sleep and suppresses arousal. Caffeine has a six-hour half life — meaning half the caffeine in a 4pm coffee is still in your system at 10pm.'

'More worrying is that excessive caffeine intake has been linked to irregular heartbeat and cardiac events in young people. The Food and Drug Administration in the U.S. has said that 1,200mg can cause seizures.'

'Caffeine can increase alertness but you can get these benefits at a tenth of this dose. Around 400mg caffeine over the whole day should be the limit. People with a history of irregular heartbeats may want to avoid caffeine.' 0/10

VITAMIN LIFT

Rokit Pods VitaCoffee, £4.99 for ten servings, rokitpods.com CLAIM: These nespresso original machinecompatible espresso pods are infused with 16 per cent of your daily recommended intake of zinc, 15 per cent of your daily selenium and nearly half your vitamin D3, 'to support and contribute to your wellbeing'. EXPERT VERDICT: 'The health claims for the nutrients added to this coffee are correct,' says Helen

Bond. 'In particular selenium (for a healthy immune system, thyroid gland and strong hair and nails) and vitamin D (for bones and immunity) are useful to add. Most people don't lack zinc.

'It's worth noting that one cup of this coffee provides only 2.3mcg vitamin D — in the UK it is recommended we take 10mcg as a supplement between October and March as we don't get enough from sunlight. To optimise the benefits, drink this with food such as full-fat yoghurt, as you need fat to absorb vitamin D.

'A basic multivitamin with a standard coffee would be cheaper than the four cups of this a day you'd need to adequately cover your vitamin D needs.' 7/10

FAT BURNER

Rapid Fire Keto Coffee, £21.99 for 225g, amazon.co.uk CLAIM: Described as a 'high-performance fatburning coffee blend' for 'energy, metabolism and brain power', this instant coffee contains added fat (9g per serving) in the form of powdered butter and MCT (medium-chain triglyceride) oil. EXPERT VERDICT: 'If you are already on a low-calorie keto diet — with around 80 per cent of your calories coming from fat and virtually none from carbs — this could help keep the body in ketosis, the metabolic state whereby the body uses fat for energy and, in theory, helps with weight loss,' says noor Al-Refae.

'MCTs are a type of saturated fat found in high quantities in coconut oil. They are easily broken down for energy, and may help curb appetite, but drinking all that fat makes some people feel queasy.

'Together with the high dose of 150mg caffeine per cup, I could see it would help dieters beat sluggishness and hunger, but it offers poor nutrition to start the day considering you might have it instead of breakfast. An egg and spinach omelette with a black coffee would be a healthier and cheaper low-carb choice.' 2/10

COGNITIVE ENHANCER

Cognito Smart Coffee, £11.99 for 250g, amazon.co.uk CLAIM: This ground coffee 'is blended with cognitive enhancers', the maker says. These include inositol, acetyl-L-carnitine, L-theanine, L-tyrosine and DMAE, which can help you 'excel at mental tasks'. EXPERT VERDICT: 'There are varying levels of evidence behind the supposed "nootropics" here,' says Helen Bond. 'For example, a small industry-funded, but randomised, trial

found that the 200mg L-theanine — an amino acid, a building block of protein — daily helps with anxiety, poor sleep, some memory functions and verbal fluency.

'evidence for DMAE, or dimethylamino dimethylaminoethanol, a chemical found in oily fish that's said to boost learning and mood, is scant. There is mixed evidence for acetyl-L-carnitine boosting memory, and weak evidence for inositol helping depression, but at levels far higher than in this coffee.

'Taurine combined with caffeine may improve mental performance, according to some studies, but again you'd probably need more than the amount here. It's hard to say if this coffee will give a mental boost over the standard lift you'll get from the caffeine any cup of coffee contains.'

3/10

PRE-WORKOUT PUSH

TNT Instant Coffee HIIT, £5.49 for 120g, tntsupplements.co.uk CLAIM: This is instant coffee laced with guarana, a seed source of caffeine, and B vitamins. A cup has 158mg of caffeine. It's 'proven to promote energy yielding metabolism, contribute to mental performance and reduce tiredness', the maker says. It suggests you have it pre-workout or to get ready for an 'explosive' morning. EXPERT VERDICT: 'This gives you about 50 per cent more caffeine than the average mug of instant coffee, but is on par with filter coffee,' says Helen Bond.

'There's some evidence that the natural chemicals in guarana heighten the stimulant effects over caffeine alone, so it's possible this might create greater alertness — a 2015 study in the journal PLoS one found this, but in flatworms.

'There are five B vitamins added to this, four of which — B1, B5, B6 and B7 — help in releasing energy from food. But the amount of vitamin B12 is huge — 62.5mcg per cup, which is 25 times your daily needs. It helps reduce fatigue and keeps the immune and nervous systems healthy, but there's no evidence that more will produce a bigger benefit and official advice is not to take too much.'

6/10