

Wake up to the many benefits a cup of coffee offers

On World Coffee Day, we look at ways the beloved brew may safeguard your health

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The coffee houses of the 17th and 18th centuries are seen as having been drivers of the Age of Enlightenment – a philosophical movement that dominated the world of ideas in Europe in that era.



Great minds of the time would meet over a cup to discuss anything from science and philosophy to fashion.

Coffee is still fuelling conversations now, but it is generally consumed with a lot less ceremony and in many more forms.

Studies have shown that the “right amount” of coffee may confer many health benefits, including preventing heart disease, stroke, diabetes, even kidney disease. But what is the right amount of coffee?

“Technically, you can drink up to five cups of standard coffee a day,” says Hong Kong registered dietitian Zoe Tsui. “The guidance is 300mg of caffeine a day.” The amount will differ depending on whether it is a double-shot latte or just an espresso shot you drink.

“This is why we usually advise drinkers to limit [themselves] to one to two cups a day, which brings down the chances of going over.”

While the city’s love of coffee has increased, is the coffee we drink the healthy stuff? Studies have shown that drinking dark roast coffee may prevent oxidative DNA damage, which can lead to cancer.

What is the difference between light and dark roasts?

According to Teddy Pun, the director of Hong Kong’s Cupping Room Coffee Roasters, light to medium roasted beans tend to have a light body with a delicate but bright acidity profile, with notes of stone fruits, flower and citrus.

“Dark roast coffee beans stay on the roaster for a longer time or at a higher temperature,” Pun says. “As a result, the complexity that light roast coffee has starts to disappear.” Dark roasts have a thicker body, with bolder flavours such as plain chocolate and toasted nuts.

Coffee is not just high in caffeine, it is also packed with antioxidants. Either or both of these components have been found to help in the prevention of many serious health conditions, including seven outlined below.

Heart disease

“This is the most cited health benefit of coffee, mostly attributed to caffeine,” says Tsui. A study published this week in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology suggests that drinking two to three cups a day of most types of coffee may protect against cardiovascular disease and early death.

Drinking two to three cups of coffee a day was linked to the largest reduction in early death, compared to those who drank no coffee. Ground coffee lowered the risk of death by 27 per cent, followed by 14 per cent for decaffeinated and 11 per cent for instant caffeinated coffee.

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Type 2 diabetes

Tsui points out that the antioxidants such as flavonoids and polyphenols in coffee can reduce oxidative stress, which plays a role in disease development. It may also lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

In a recent study, increasing daily coffee consumption by one cup was associated with an 11 per cent lower relative risk of type 2 diabetes compared to those who made no changes. Reducing coffee consumption by a cup or more, though, was associated with a 17 per cent higher risk of type 2 diabetes.

TEDDY PUN,

CUPPING ROOM COFFEE ROASTERS

Parkinson’s disease

Studies have shown that the caffeine and antioxidants in coffee are not only linked to a lower chance of developing Parkinson’s disease, but may also help sufferers better control their movements.

Liver health

Drinking regular or decaffeinated coffee may safeguard your liver. Research shows coffee drinkers are more likely to have liver enzyme levels within a healthy range than those who do not drink coffee.

Colon cancer

Researchers found drinkers of decaf or regular coffee were 26 per cent less likely to develop colorectal cancer. People who drank two or more cups of decaffeinated coffee a day had a lower risk of colon and rectal cancer compared to people who did not drink decaffeinated coffee.

Alzheimer’s disease

A study published in 2021 in the journal *Frontiers In Ageing Neuroscience* suggests regular coffee consumption slows cognitive decline and may protect against Alzheimer’s disease. This may be because of its link to slowing amyloid accumulation, which generally develops first in the areas of the brain concerned with memory and other cognitive functions.

Stroke

A recent systematic review of more than 20 studies involving 2.4 million people found that having three to four cups of coffee a day was linked to a 21 per cent lower risk of stroke. Having more than this amount of coffee was not found to reduce the risk any further.