

## Too much coffee can cause irritability, headaches

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A Finnish study, published in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition in 2007, tracked coffee consumption and the development of Parkinson's disease in 6,710 men and women over 22 years. It discovered that those who drank at least 10 cups of coffee a day had a significantly lower risk of developing the disease than non-drinkers.



The Finns are among the world's top coffee drinkers.

Commenting on the findings, Mr Ong says caffeine may produce a stimulating effect on the brain cells, which may be why heavy coffee drinkers had a lower risk of developing Parkinson's disease.

However, too much caffeine can be harmful, warn health experts.

As caffeine is a strong source of stimulant and psychoactive substance, it can impact how the brain works in terms of one's thoughts, feelings and behaviour, says Dr Lapsys.

"Consuming too much coffee can overstimulate the mind. It can lead to nervousness, irritability, headaches, dehydration and heart palpitations," he adds.

According to Ms Yeo, some people may be more sensitive to caffeine than others, as effects vary across people depending on how quickly one metabolises it.

“Hence, if you experience side effects such as anxiety, irritability, stomach discomfort or insomnia, consider cutting down your intake and speak to your healthcare provider for a recommended intake,” she says.

So how much coffee should one drink in a day?

Dietitians say up to 400mg of caffeine – roughly four cups of brewed coffee – is safe for most healthy adults.

However, Dr Lapsys points out that different types of coffee contain varying amounts of caffeine.

For instance, a single- or doubleshot espresso contains 60 to 70mg of caffeine, whereas a pack of instant coffee has about 60mg, he says.

But, as the saying goes, everything in moderation. Ms Yeo says coffee, when consumed in balanced amounts, can influence one’s energy levels, cognition, memory and mood which, in turn, increase mental alertness and concentration.

Dr Lapsys adds: “The impact of coffee can be felt immediately and can last for about six hours. It helps when a person has to do decisionmaking tasks or something that requires focus.”

Those who can metabolise caffeine quickly can reap the benefits of caffeine better than those who do it slowly, says Mr Ong.

Besides genetic testing, one way to test if your body is able to metabolise caffeine quickly is through trial and error.

“For example, if you experience heart palpitations after just one cup of coffee or if you cannot sleep after drinking one cup five hours before bedtime, you are more sensitive to the effects of caffeine,” he adds.

Though coffee may impart a number of health benefits, certain groups of people should be wary of their intake.

For instance, pregnant women and those breastfeeding should not consume above 200mg of caffeine a day, say dietitians.

Ms Yeo notes that it is also not ideal for those with stomach issues, such as heartburn or acid reflux to consume coffee, as caffeine is acidic and could irritate the gastrointestinal tract.

Children, adolescents, those with chronic diseases such as heart conditions and/or high blood pressure, as well as people with sleeping disorders should also watch their coffee intake, she adds.

Children should limit their caffeine intake to a minimum of 2.5mg per kilogram of body weight, while adolescents can consume about 100mg of caffeine, which is around one cup of coffee a day.

Ultimately, moderation is key, say experts.

Ms Yeo adds: “Although coffee may appear to have some health benefits and does not seem to have detrimental effects for most healthy individuals, it is not recommended to start drinking coffee or increase consumption for any health benefit.”