

- Longevity

A CUP OF COFFEE MIGHT HELP YOU LIVE LONGER AND BETTER

Studies suggest daily coffee consumption boosts longevity, prevents Alzheimer's and dementia and improves physical and mental ability in the elderly

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A freshly brewed morning cup of coffee. Most of us don't begin our day without it. If you're worried about giving up coffee as you grow older, you don't have to be. Coffee has been linked to longevity. Drinking two to three cups of coffee a day can help you live longer.



According to research published in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology in 2022, drinking three to four cups of coffee was discovered to be linked with a longer lifespan and lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

As study author Peter Kistler explained, coffee doesn't just contain caffeine: There are over 100 biologically active components in coffee. While scientists are still trying to understand all the properties of coffee, the non-caffeinated compounds are said to be responsible for the positive relationships observed between coffee drinking, cardiovascular disease and survival.

He concluded, "Drinking modest amounts of coffee of all types should not be discouraged but can be enjoyed as a heart healthy behaviour."

All about moderation

"I think coffee lovers should be pleased to know that drinking moderate amounts each day shows some excellent health benefits," says Hala El-Shafie, consultant dietitian, eating disorders and bariatric surgery specialist at Sage Clinics in Dubai. "Coffee is rich in polyphenols. The inflammatory and antioxidant properties of which play an important role in maintaining heart and brain health."

The coffee beans that are so carefully brewed, are rich in antioxidants that protect the body's cells against damage. They also contain phenolic compounds, which are substances that are found in plants that are essential for the body's defence systems.

“The studies do suggest that if consumed regularly over a long period of time, cups of coffee may reduce the risk of developing certain types of cancers and has also been shown to have a protective effect against type 2 diabetes,” she says.

3-4 cup a day is good

According to El-Shafie, drinking around three to four cups of coffee a day has been shown to have a cardioprotective effect. “It is also linked with reducing the risk of a stroke,” she adds. El-Shafie cites a recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which included over 400,000 participants, showed that for light to moderate coffee drinkers, there was a 12 per cent associated lower risk of mortality. There was 17 per cent reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease, and a 21 per cent lower risk of stroke, she explained.

A sign of physical strength?

According to new research conducted by the National University of Singapore, healthy ageing doesn't mean you have to sacrifice that morning cup of coffee. In this study spanning 20 years, participants were interviewed in midlife, with the average being around 53, about their caffeine intake, then again at an average age of 73, when they were asked: “Do you feel full of energy?”

Their weight was recorded as well as their hand grip. Out of the coffee drinkers, 52.9 per cent drank one cup a day, 42.2 per cent two to three cups and 4.9 per cent, four or more. The 4.9 per cent were found to have significantly reduced odds of physical frailty in later life, compared with the ones who didn't drink coffee daily. However, of course, the researcher did add that further studies were needed to assess if the effects were mediated by caffeine or other chemical compounds.

Preventing cognitive decline in elderly

There's something hypnotic about that strong smell of brewed coffee. It wakes up the senses, and makes you feel alert. The whole ritual of drinking coffee in the morning also has a psychological impact: You feel like you're ready for the day, explains Lily-Anne Scott, a UAE-based dietician and nutritionist.

They automatically feel alert and attentive. And of course, research shows that coffee has a deep impact on the brain. She cites a 2017 study published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. According to the study, 676 men between the ages of 60 and 70, who drank coffee regularly, were found to have less cognitive decline than those who didn't. Explaining how coffee can stimulate the brain, she says that caffeine increases serotonin, the happiness hormone and acetylcholine, an important neurotransmitter that plays a role in brain functions, such as memory, and body functions.

This was the result of another study, where around 47 people went through MRI scans of their brain before drinking their morning coffee. They also drank a cup after the scans. The rest were given caffeine diluted in hot water and underwent the same types of MRI scans before and after they consumed the beverage.

This research showed that there were certain changes in the brain that were the result of coffee, while others were the result of caffeine, explains Scott. There are ongoing studies

regarding the links between consumption of coffee and preventing Alzheimer's and dementia, which seem to be indicative of positive results.

How much can we believe the research?

However, can we trust these studies and research that show coffee has long-term benefits preventing cognitive impairment and cardiovascular diseases?

"Well, the evidence is based on long-term studies that there are benefits surrounding coffee, in terms of cognitive health. There are deep connections between coffee and longevity, quality of life, so there must be some truth in it," explains Scott. "The data does suggest an association between daily coffee consumption and longevity of life. There are strong links, even if there isn't a clear and established causation."

However, she maintains that the important keyword in coffee consumption, is moderation. How much is too much?

"Striking a balance is key," explains El-Shafie. "Drinking too much coffee can also negatively affect health by increased levels of triglycerides and low density lipoproteins, cholesterol, as it can have a damaging effect on heart health. It can also lead to other chronic diseases, so moderation is key. Around three to four cups a day is a good number to aim for." However, if you are someone who suffers from anxiety, reducing your caffeine intake is advised. "Even if caffeine doesn't cause anxiety, it can exacerbate the anxiety symptoms," she adds.

If consumed regularly over a long period of time, cups of coffee may reduce the risk of developing certain types of cancers and has also been shown to have a protective effect against type 2 diabetes."

Hala El-Shafie | Consultant dietitian