

# A Coffee a Day...

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For most of the last half century, coffee was a health pariah, suspected of causing everything from breast, colon and pancreatic cancer to heart disease, infertility and birth defects.

To get to the bottom of often wild speculation based on the flimsiest of evidence, the medical world swung into action in the 1980s and 1990s, with many leading scientists and research bodies investigating coffee's effects on health.

Today, some 19,000 studies later, it is clear most concerns didn't amount to a hill of beans.

The stage is now set for coffee to become repositioned as a health food.

"Overall, the research shows that coffee is far more healthful than it is harmful," says Tomas DePaulis, of the Vanderbilt University Institute for Coffee Studies.

"For most people, very little bad comes from drinking it, but a lot of good." **CPM**

Adapted from *The National Post* (September 4, 2004).

## Other health concerns...Then & Now

### Breast cancer

*Then:* In the late '70s, a link was suggested between fibrocystic breast cancer and caffeine.

*Now:* By 1992, researchers found no breast cancer risk associated with coffee drinking.

### Birth defects

*Then:* A study in '80 that forced caffeine to rats linked caffeine with birth defects.

*Now:* Followup studies in the '90s failed to confirm this link.

### Osteoporosis

*Now:* A '97 study found no association between lifetime caffeine consumption and bone changes or osteoporosis risk in post-menopausal women, whether they were low, moderate or high coffee drinkers.

## Can coffee do good?

- A Harvard study showed men who drank more than six 8-ounce cups/day lowered their Type 2 diabetes risk by half and women by about 30%.
- Studies in U.S., Japan and Italy showed drinking 3 to 4 cups of coffee/day was associated with an 80% risk reduction for cirrhosis of the liver.
- A 10-year study of 45,000 men found 2 to 3 cups of coffee/day reduced the risk of developing gallstones by 40%.
- According to a 2003 study from the Institute of Food Chemistry (University of Munster, Germany), coffee may also hold benefits as a cancer fighter.

## Linking coffee & heart disease?

### What were they saying?

1. **Western Electric Study (late '50s)**
  - Those who drank 3 cups or less of decaffeinated coffee/day had less heart disease than those who drank regular coffee.
2. **Boston Collaborative Drug Surveillance Program ('70s)**
  - Patients who had been hospitalized for heart attacks were likelier to have been coffee drinkers.
3. **Study in *The Lancet* ('71)**
  - Coffee drinking could be linked to bladder cancer.
4. **Harvard study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* ('81)**
  - Coffee could account for most pancreatic cancer, with two cups doubling and five cups tripling the risk.

### What are they saying now?

1. **Scottish Heart Health Study (late '90s)**
  - The higher the coffee consumption, the lower the chances of heart disease or death.
2. **Study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* ('96)**
  - Drinking one cup of coffee/day led to no significant increase in the risk of developing high blood pressure.
3. **Study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* (2000)**
  - Among women, the more coffee they drank, the less likely they were to die from any cause.
  - Among men, those who consumed "moderate" amounts of coffee (4 to 7 cups/day) faced the least risk of death from heart disease.
  - Among high-risk populations, coffee drinkers remained less likely to die of heart disease than coffee abstainers.