

Health**Guzzling coffee may cut heart disease**By [Ewen Callaway](#)

📅 16 June 2008



A strong cup of coffee in the morning can feel like a life saver. Now, one of the largest and longest studies of coffee drinking suggests that coffee may indeed boost your lifespan – providing you drink enough of the stuff, that is.

The study tracked 129,000 men and women over two decades. It found that people who consumed several cups of coffee every day were less likely to die of heart disease than those who shied away from the stuff. Heart disease is an umbrella term for conditions including heart attacks, stroke, and arrhythmia.


The researchers found that women who drank four to five cups per day were 34% less likely to die of heart disease, while men who had more than five cups a day were 44% less likely to die.



Consumption caution

The new report adds heft to the hypothesis that coffee can stem heart disease, perhaps by battling the inflammatory damage associated with early stage illness.

“It looks like coffee has some effect that hasn’t been established before. The general idea is that coffee is not so bad,” says study leader Esther Lopez-Garcia, an epidemiologist at the [Autonomous University of Madrid](http://www.uam.es/) <http://www.uam.es/>.

Yet Lopez-Garcia and other experts caution that it’s too early for people to act on the study’s findings.

“Before declaring that drinking up to seven cups of coffee per day is beneficial for health, we should wait for some other confirmation,” warns Francesco Sofi, an epidemiologist at the [University of Florence](http://www.unifi.it/)  <http://www.unifi.it/>, who was not involved in the study.

The new study is not the first to connect coffee drinking with good health. Over the years, other research has linked coffee consumption with lower rates of heart attack, [liver cancer](#)  </article/mg18524885-700-coffee-may-reduce-liver-cancer-risk/> and [diabetes](#)  </article/dn3032-coffee-drinkers-have-lower-diabetes-risk/>.

Less risk of death

One limitation of previous studies, Lopez-Garcia says, was their measure of coffee drinking – often noted at the beginning of the study and assumed to stay constant for several years or even decades.

Her team instead measured coffee consumption through surveys performed every couple years under two studies of the health impacts of dozens of dietary and environmental factors, from vitamin E to drinking alcohol.

Beginning in 1980, the researchers collected coffee consumption statistics for 86,214 women enrolled in a study of nurses’ health. And in 1986 they began collecting data for 41,736 men involved in a follow-up study of health professionals.

When Lopez-Garcia’s team ended their analysis in 2004, 6,888 men and 11,095 women had died, many from cardiovascular disease.

For both groups, coffee seemed to give a health boost. After accounting for other factors such as smoking and obesity, the researchers found that women who drank four to five cups of coffee per day were 26% less likely to die from any cause. Men who put down more than five cups of coffee per day were 35% less likely to die.


“The more coffee you drink the less risk of mortality you have,” Lopez-Garcia says.

Differing results


However, her team noticed an even more dramatic effect in deaths caused by cardiovascular disease. She speculates that anti-inflammatory compounds found in coffee may be responsible for its apparent health benefits.

This is in spite of high levels of caffeine, which might increase the chances of suffering a heart attack by raising blood pressure. “Our hypothesis is that caffeine has a short term effect, but in the longer term, [other aspects of coffee are] more important,” she says.

Other studies have, however, shown just the opposite. In 2007, Sofi analysed more than 20 studies of health and coffee drinking and found little consensus.

One explanation for these conflicting results could be genetic. In 2006, a team of Canadian researchers discovered that people with a mutation in a [gene involved in metabolising caffeine](#)  [/article/dn8816-genes-decide-if-coffee-hurts-or-helps-your-heart/](#) had higher rates of heart attack than people without the mutation.

Journal reference: [Annals of Internal Medicine](#)  <http://www.annals.org/> (vol 148, p 913)

Drugs and Alcohol – Learn more in our comprehensive [special report](#)  [/channel/health/drugs-alcohol/](#).