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Study Shows Coffee May Reduce Risk of Diabetes in Postmenopausal Women

A study recently published in the June issue of Archives of Internal Medicine found that intake of coffee, particularly decaffeinated blends, may be associated with reduced risk of type-2 diabetes mellitus in postmenopausal women.¹

Researchers from the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota (UM) analyzed the Iowa Women's Health Study, a prospective cohort study of postmenopausal women residing in Iowa conducted in 1986 to 1997, for information related to coffee consumption and diabetes incidences. Of the 41,836 women who completed the baseline questionnaire of the Iowa study, 28,812 met the criteria for inclusion in the analysis by the UM researchers. Nearly half the analyzed cohort (14,224) reported consuming 1 to 3 cups of coffee daily; 2,928 claimed to drink no coffee; 3,231 reported drinking less than a cup per day; 5,554 reported drinking 4 to 5 cups per day; and 2,875 claimed to drink 6 or more cups per day. Regular (caffeinated) coffee was more frequently consumed than decaffeinated coffee, particularly among those who consumed high levels of coffee.

The results of the analysis demonstrated an inverse association between coffee intake and diabetes risk. Women who reported drinking 6 or more cups of coffee per day had a 34% reduction in diabetes risk compared to those who claimed no coffee intake. When various anthropometric (comparative measurements of the human body), lifestyle, and dietary factors were taken into account (i.e., physical exercise, body mass index, cereal fiber consumption), this association was weakened, so that women drinking 6 or more cups of coffee each day had a 22% reduction in diabetes risk compared to women who drank no coffee.

The inverse associations between coffee intake and diabetes risk were stronger for decaffeinated coffee than for regular coffee. After lifestyle and dietary adjustments were made, there no longer appeared to be an association between caffeinated coffee consumption and diabetes risk, whereas the association between decaffeinated coffee consumption and diabetes risk was only marginally weakened by lifestyle and other dietary considerations. The authors conclude that caffeine intake was not associated with diabetes risk reduction in their study, which they write contradicts the findings of previous studies. They further write that magnesium and phytate from coffee do not appear to be associated with diabetes risk reduction, although their study was not equipped to thoroughly explore other possible potential causal relationship of coffee's phytochemistry and diabetes risk association.

However, increased coffee consumption may not be the best route to help reduce the risk of diabetes. Many natural health advocates often prefer modification of diet, improved exercise, and the judicious use of specific herbs and other dietary supplements to control blood sugar levels and

prevent or treat diabetes. For example, Jon Barron, founder of the nonprofit Baseline of Health Foundation and creator of Baseline Nutritionals, a division of the company International Health Resources that sells Barron's formulations directly to the public, recently wrote in his e-newsletter that better alternatives exist for diabetes management than coffee consumption.² "You can drop your risk (of diabetes) to close to zero by merely changing your diet to minimize consumption of high glycemic foods and consuming a few protective supplements such as gymnema sylvestre [sic] and cinnamon extracts. And, although coffee may help with diabetes, it carries a slew of health risks in its own right," Barron wrote.² According to Barron, the caffeine from regular coffee is addictive,³ exhausts the adrenal glands,⁴ and increases the risk of arterial inflammation and the incidence of heart attacks.⁵ Even decaffeinated coffee can raise LDL ("bad") cholesterol,⁶ he writes. Moreover, decaffeinated blends contain at least a small amount of caffeine,⁷ as well as toxic solvents such as methylene chloride,⁸ depending on the decaffeination process (some decaffeinated coffee employs a water-based process).

-Courtney Cavaliere

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