

Coffee

To drink or not to drink?



The Origins of Coffee

It is believed that the early discovery of coffee beans were through a young Ethiopian, whose goats seemed to gain great vitality upon eating the berries. Soon enough, they were being eaten by local communities to provide energy and were also being made into a wine with the pulp of the berry.

A few centuries later, the beans made their way to Arabia, where they were

roasted and became a popular drink, (particularly as alcohol was forbidden among Muslim communities). In fact, the direct translation of the word “breakfast” in Arabic means “before coffee”.



Arabia was the first to export coffee beans, but maintained their monopoly over it by boiling the beans prior to sale to ensure that the seeds were infertile.

Coffee arrived to the Americas in the mid-1600s, at which point many coffee-houses were established. The drink's popularity didn't really take off until after the events of the Boston Tea Party in 1773!

Now days, many people rely on their daily coffee "fix" to peel themselves out of bed or keep them going mid-day. In fact, many offices have provided coffee stations for employees as a means of improving productivity throughout the day.

What's in your specialty coffee?

There are so many different ways to prepare coffee! Your average cup of Joe just doesn't cut it for many, yet it can also be overwhelming to have so many options thrown your way when getting in line at the coffee shop. Here is a simple breakdown of common orders for those occasional indulgences.



The Good and the Bad

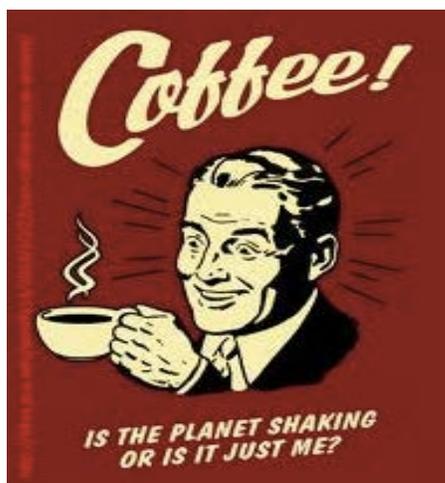
You've probably heard a lot of contradiction when it comes to coffee. Some say that it's bad for you, while others will tout of all the health benefits in each cup. Like many of life's simple pleasures, there are pros and cons to indulging in a cup (or several) of coffee regularly. Here are just a few things to consider the next time you reach for your morning boost.

Pros

- Enjoyed world-wide for its rich flavour and pleasant aroma;
- Reduces fatigue;
- Improves mental and physical performance;
- Source of antioxidants, protecting the body's cells from damage;
- Promotes regularity (laxative effects);
- Increases metabolism and suppresses appetite, which could contribute to weight loss efforts;
- Reduces the risk of type II Diabetes through increased insulin and decreased blood sugar.

Cons

- Regular consumption can lead to dependency. Withdrawal symptoms include headache, irritability, fatigue, anxiety, and jitters;
- Over-stimulating to some causing insomnia and restlessness;
- Increases blood pressure and heart rate;
- Increases cortisol and inflammatory markers, which can worsen the body's response to stress and tax the adrenal glands;
- Raises total and LDL cholesterol if not paper filtered (ie espresso, French pressed coffee, etc);
- Coffee is acidifying. Calcium and magnesium are pulled from the bones into the blood to buffer the blood's pH. This heightens the risk of osteoporosis by depleting bone minerals and can lead to calcium plaques in the arteries through an increase in blood-calcium levels;
- May be contaminated with pesticides.





Did you know that coffee beans are exposed to many pesticides during their growth period? Even though the use of many harmful pesticides has been banned by Canada's regulatory agencies, they continue to be used in many countries world-wide. Not only are the plants sprayed with the pesticides, but they are also absorbed into the plant through the run-off in the soil. This means that pesticides get incorporated into the genetic make-up of the beans! Here are a few pesticides which are commonly used on coffee plants:

- **Endosulfan** – Disrupts the central nervous system and can damage the kidneys and liver. It is being phased out in US and Canada as of 2011, but toxic remnants persist in the soil.
- **Chlorpyrifos** – This is a contact poison and has caused many deaths and birth defects. It became restricted for use around children (schools, daycares, residential) in the US in 2000, but is commonly used on golf courses and against mosquitos. It is known to bioaccumulate the effects are devastating for farmers, birds, bees, and other mammals.
- **Diazinon** – Mainly toxic if inhaled. It is still in use in the US and Canada for turfgrass.
- **Methyl parathion** – among the most toxic! This pesticide bioaccumulates in soil and is extremely dangerous to be around within 48 hours of being sprayed. It is restricted in the US and Canada, but not well regulated in Central America.
- **Triadimefon** – May affect the reproductive system and has produced hyperactivity in rats.

To avoid the negative health effects of pesticides, choose organically grown coffee. Not only is this better for your health, but you are also reducing the exposure risks for the dedicated coffee farmers! Now that's something to feel good about!



Its all in the genes...

A gene (CYP1A2) has been discovered that determines how coffee affects you. Either you are a fast metabolizer or a slow metabolizer of caffeine. A fast metabolizer gets the energy boosting effects and feels like they can take on the world! A slow metabolizer usually gets many side effects with caffeine, but may rely on it to pull them through the day anyhow. These are the people who will be up all night if they have coffee in the afternoon!



If you plan to continue drinking your regular cup of java, here are a few ways to minimize some of the negative health effects:

- Choose organic and fair-trade whenever possible;
- Don't drink coffee in the late afternoon or evening to prevent disrupted sleep cycles;
- Cut out the milk, cream, and sugar. These are extra "empty" calories that can add up quickly!
- Everything in moderation...



For a coffee alternative, try a cup of green tea, roasted chicory root, or a tasty apple, which can give you a caffeine-free energy boost from natural sugars!

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