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Studies Show Caffeine's Dual Nature

Once considered harmful, caffeine has recently been given a face-lift of sorts thanks to a number of scientific studies into its potential benefits and supposed bad qualities. Here's a summary:

Pros

The Famous Boost

Caffeine can sharpen your short-term memory, trick you into feeling less tired, and trigger a mild, sometimes useful stress. In recent studies of some longtime coffee drinkers, it has been shown that this stress was not found to be linked to an increased risk of hypertension. And athletes sometimes use caffeine for a temporary edge: caffeine may blunt the pain of sore muscles.

Disease Prevention

Caffeine may be linked to fewer instances of Parkinson's disease among coffee drinkers, as well as a reduced risk of liver cancer, cirrhosis, gallstones, colon cancer, and type 2 diabetes. Health experts know the antioxidants and chlorogenic acid in coffee are beneficial to the human body; the caffeine is increasingly seen as helpful, too.

Low-Guilt Options

Coffee and tea have very low or no calories, cholesterol, fat, sodium, and carbs. Of course, sugar changes that. If you've never been a fan of black coffee before, now might be the time to give it another chance, though a little milk may be good for your bones. Sodas are another story. Unlike in tea and coffee, the caffeine in soda is not natural, and few sodas contain antioxidants.

Brain Fitness

According to studies of mice given 6 to 8 cups of coffee a day at Cornell University and Turku University in Finland, caffeine may prevent damage to the nervous system. Other studies have linked coffee to decreased incidences of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. Additionally, the Cornell-Turku study shows that caffeine may prevent MS from developing in mice, suggesting that more research should be done on how caffeine and the nervous system interact in humans.

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QUICK TIPS

Caffeine's Perks And Downers:

- Perk: Caffeine picks you up, naturally—and hasn't been shown to put you at risk for hypertension or heart disease.
- Downer: If you're used to a lot of caffeine and suddenly cut back, you may feel fatigued and irritable.
- Perk: Caffeine may help prevent Parkinson's disease, liver diseases, colon cancer, and type 2 diabetes.
- Downer: Some caffeine users may have trouble sleeping.
- Perk: If you don't add anything to your coffee and tea, you're enjoying a zero-calorie, no-fat treat.
- Downer: Caffeine probably can't help you lose weight.



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Cons

Mild Addiction

When caffeine lovers don't receive enough of what their bodies are used to, they can develop feelings of irritability, anxiety, or fatigue. And some caffeinated foods aren't even labeled as such; one cup of coffee-flavored yogurt can have the same caffeine as a full cup of coffee or have no caffeine at all. Knowledge of what you're consuming and moderation in consumption are keys to good health.

Sleeplessness

Drinking one or two cups of coffee before 4 PM generally shouldn't ruin a good night's sleep. But caffeine intake throughout the day can lower the number of minutes you sleep at night, even if you don't remember waking. Caffeine seems to affect individuals' sleep patterns in various ways. Some coffee aficionados may crash once they stop consuming caffeine; others complain of insomnia.

Not Useful For Weight Loss

Although caffeine perks you up and gives you energy, a wide-ranging, long-term study has found that it doesn't seem to add up: some people even gain weight as they increase caffeine use.

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Coffee Myths

Caffeine Dehydrates You

It may surprise you, but caffeinated liquids act as diuretics only if they contain more than 575 mg of caffeine. Below that number, caffeine doesn't negatively affect hydration.

Caffeine Increases Your Risk of Heart Disease

At least for regular coffee drinkers with no preexisting heart conditions, caffeine appears not to increase the risk of heart disease, heart attack, or arrhythmia.

Bone Loss?

Studies have shown only a small reduction in calcium absorption due to caffeine consumption. Doctors do sometimes advise those at risk for osteoporosis to avoid caffeine, but for many of us, drinking two tablespoons of milk per day can add back any calcium lost to caffeine.

Another Culprit?

Studies indicate possible links between bone loss and the consumption of sodas, which contain phosphoric and carbonic acids. Soda has been described as "osteoporosis in a can." Carbonation upsets the stomach, which then pulls calcium from blood cells; this in turn causes blood cells to pull calcium from the bones to keep a steady supply of the vital nutrient to the brain. Regardless of caffeine's connection to bone loss, drinking a lot of caffeinated soda is probably not a good idea, especially for women.

So whether coffee or tea, your favorite naturally caffeinated drink's contributions to your health may sometimes appear contradictory, but will rarely be all bad.

Note: This web site may contain general medical and health information. Such information is provided for informational purposes; the site sponsor does not claim expertise in these categories. Patients should always consult with a doctor or other health care professionals for medical advice.

[Your Body Needs Them. Fish Make Them. Beneficial Omega-3s Have Everyone Talking. >](#) [◀ first](#) [▶ previous](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#)

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Your Body Needs Them. Fish Make Them. Beneficial Omega-3s Have Everyone Talking.

If you've ever wondered exactly what "omega-3s" are and why they seem to be such a big deal in the health world, you're not alone.

What are they?

Omega-3s are essential polyunsaturated fatty acids commonly found in fish, yet not so commonly in the diet of the average American. While we don't know everything about omega-3s yet, our bodies clearly crave them, and for good reason. Omega-3s have been linked to better heart health and fewer chronic diseases, and our bodies can't build some cells without them. Let's run down the most important facts about omega-3s:

Your body needs omega-3s but can't produce them

This strange situation is especially important for children in the womb, who need omega-3s for brain growth. Some groups like the Inuit may have once obtained fatty acids in greater quantity by eating fish. As their diets shifted, they may have lost their ready supply of omega-3s.

There are 3 main types of omega-3s

Though your body doesn't produce omega-3s on its own, it can synthesize two of the fatty acids it really needs—EPA and DHA—from the more common alpha-linolenic acid, or ALA, found in leafy greens, nuts, flax, and some other plants. Scientists, however, believe more research is needed into ALA.

Your heart may benefit from omega-3s

The fatty acids have been shown by numerous studies to lower high blood pressure, decrease triglyceride levels, slow the growth of atherosclerotic plaque, and decrease risk of arrhythmia. The American Heart Association recommends eating fish twice a week and, for those with documented heart conditions, taking omega-3 supplements.

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QUICK TIPS

5 Easy Ways to Boost Your Omega-3s:

1. Twice a week, eat fatty fish—like tuna, mackerel, and salmon.
2. Take fish oil pills every day; many are entirely mercury-free.
3. Use olive oil instead of butter.
4. Eat foods containing flax, including some breads and cereals.
5. Add walnuts to your salads.

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Your Body Needs Them. Fish Make Them. Beneficial Omega-3s Have Everyone Talking.

You can obtain quality omega-3s from fish oil

Omega3s are found in greatest concentration in fatty fish, including mackerel, salmon, and tuna. Their natural oils can be distilled, deodorized and pollutants removed; you'll find fish oil pills in many health stores. Cod liver oil is traditionally taken to boost levels of vitamins A and D. Be careful, you can actually overdose on both vitamins. Other fish oil supplements don't necessarily have high levels of vitamins A & D. Besides, cod liver oil doesn't taste very good to most people, especially compared to freshly grilled tuna.

You can obtain some omega-3s from plants

Leafy vegetables, soy, walnuts, almonds, flax seed, flax seed oil, soy-based oils, and some seaweeds have ALA, a type of omega-3, but scientists are still researching the benefits of ALA as opposed to EPA and DHA. New findings, however, suggest plant-based omega-3s may be good for bone health.

Don't take more than the recommended dosage

Consult your doctor for the best advice, but some experts recommend 500 milligrams per day for those without documented heart conditions and 1 gram per day for those who have heart trouble. Certainly, if you're allergic to fish, pass on fish oil.

What about mercury?

It's considered one of the great ironies of modern health medicine, but the best way to get omega-3s is from fish, and fish are increasingly seen as a risky food due to high mercury levels. In particular, shark, swordfish, and king mackerel can contain more mercury than other seafood. Read up on which fish have the least mercury, and moderate how much you eat.

And remember...

Research on the benefits of omega-3s has only recently picked up steam, and new studies are published frequently. Initial findings from recent studies, for example, suggest that omega-3s may enhance cognitive abilities and even improve memory. There are also new studies underway to determine whether the anti-inflammatory effects of omega-3s on the central nervous system may be useful to treat depression, especially among MS patients.

Whether you get your omega-3s from capsules or from more chewable forms, happy supplementing.

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