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## **The impact of coffee on human health**

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Coffee is one of the most popular beverages in the world. It contains lots of biologically active ingredients. These compounds not only have aromatic properties, but many of them also have antioxidant, hepatoprotective, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antiviral and relaxing smooth muscle properties.

**The aim of the study:** The purpose of the study is to collect and review scientific publications about the impact of coffee on health.

**Material and method:** The paper uses standard criteria as the research method. Additionally, during the literature review on PubMed and Google Scholar platforms, keywords such as coffee, caffeine, health, impact were used.

**Description of the state of knowledge:** Numerous studies suggest that coffee impact on the long-term functioning of the organism is negligible and is associated with the consumption of coffee for a longer period of time. Chlorogenic acid, caffeine and trigonelline are primarily responsible for the positive effect. They have a hypoglycemic, bactericidal and antioxidant effect. Diterpenes, such as kahweol and cafestol may have negative influence on health. Research also suggests that coffee can reduce the risk of Parkinson's disease and type 2 diabetes.

**Summary:** The results show that coffee ingredients can have both positive and negative effects on health. However, before these observations can be used to create nutritional advice, further research is needed. They will allow a better understanding of the mechanisms of action of the compounds responsible for reduced risk of diabetes mellitus or Parkinson's disease.

**Keywords:** coffee, caffeine, health, cardiovascular

## INTRODUCTION

Coffee is one of the most popular beverages in the world. It contains over 1000 biologically active ingredients. The final content of individual substances in coffee depends on how it is brewed. Bioactive compounds that affect the human body include caffeine, coffee acid, chlorogenic acid, trigonelline, diterpenes and melanoidins [1]. These compounds not only have aromatic properties, but many of them also have antioxidant, hepatoprotective, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antiviral and relaxing smooth muscle properties [2].

## THE CHEMISTRY OF COFFEE

### Caffeine

Caffeine is a purine alkaloid present in the form of a white crystalline powder with a bitter taste [3]. The caffeine content of coffee depends on the method of its preparation, the preferred strength of the drink, the brand of the product and the type of coffee. Caffeine is a non-selective adenosine receptor antagonist. It blocks the action of this compound through the receptors A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2A</sub>, A<sub>2B</sub> and A<sub>3</sub>. This is done by: mobilization of intracellular calcium, inhibition of phosphodiesterase (PDEs), modulation of benzodiazepine receptor (GABA<sub>A</sub>) activity and inhibition of cAMP transporters and increase of catecholamine levels [4]. At low doses it blocks A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> receptors and increases the activity of the central nervous system [5]. By stimulating adenylyl cyclase, it increases the concentration of cAMP in the cell. Inhibition of adenosine A<sub>1</sub> receptors is associated with the release of acetylcholine, noradrenaline and dopamine. The increased concentration of neurotransmitters results in accelerated heart rate, vasodilatation, increased lipolysis and relaxation of the mesangium cells [6]. The inhibition of A<sub>2</sub> receptor causes the opposite effect because it leads to a lower cAMP level in the cell [7]. The toxic effect of caffeine occurs at a concentration of 129 µmol / L (25 mg / kg body weight). After drinking 2-3 cups of coffee, level of caffeine in the plasma

reaches 20-40  $\mu\text{mol} / \text{L}$ . Therefore, normal coffee consumption does not carry the risk of overdosing [8].

### **Caffeic acid**

Caffeic acid is a representative of hydroxycinnamic acids, which are a subgroup of phenolic acids. It is synthesized in plants as a product of the shikimic acid pathway. Its precursor are amino acids: tyrosine or phenylalanine. Thanks to having hydroxyl groups, the acid has an antioxidant effect. It can also play an important role in inhibiting the peroxidation of various lipids. Thanks to its properties, it has a beneficial effect on the human body [9].

### **Chlorogenic acid**

Chlorogenic acid is the ester formed between caffeic acid and the 3-hydroxyl of L-quinic acid. According to research, this acid as a component of coffee reduces the level of gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase, which is a biomarker of the early phase of oxidative stress [9]. It is recently believed that these acids as potential modulators of cell pathways can be involved in the pathogenesis of neurodegenerative diseases and possess anti-tumor activity [8].

### **Diterpenes**

Diterpenes are a class of chemical compounds composed of two terpenic units. They consist of four isoprene subunits. Diterpenes are fat-soluble compounds, including cafestol and kahweol. They show antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer effect [10]. According to research, diterpenes contained in coffee may be associated with elevated levels of cholesterol and triglycerides in plasma cells [11].

## **THE IMPACT OF COFFEE ON HEALTH**

### **Cardiovascular system**

Some studies suggest that coffee consumption may have an effect on blood pressure, arrhythmia or coronary heart disease. Several studies have assessed the effect of large amounts of caffeine on heart rate. The results were inconclusive. They showed a significant decrease in heart rate after consuming 100 mg or 200 mg of caffeine in ordinary consumers [12,13]. Caffeine can mediate the atrial fibrillation through neurohormonal stimulation and sympathetic activation. The effects can be increased in people who do not drink coffee every day [14]. Caffeine toxicity may cause supraventricular tachycardia, atrial fibrillation and ventricular fibrillation [15]. The effect of coffee on the health of people with stable coronary artery disease is not fully understood. However, the results of most studies indicate that consumption of more than five cups of coffee can cause disease progression [16, 17]. A dose of caffeine corresponding to 2-3 cups of coffee may increase systolic blood pressure by 3-14 mmHg and diastolic blood pressure by 4-13 mmHg in people with normotension. In people with hypertension, this effect may be greater. The habitual consumption of coffee can lead to the formation of tolerance to caffeine, making its effect on pressure less visible [18].

### **Cancers**

Some epidemiological studies show correlations between the consumption of caffeinated coffee and cancer risk. The results of studies conducted in 2019 show that caffeic acid present in coffee may play an important role in the treatment of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). This compound has anti-HCC activity, preventing excessive formation of oxygen radicals and thus helping to kill cancer cells through DNA oxidation [19]. In 2019, research was conducted on the influence of coffee on the development of brain cancer. The results suggest that higher coffee consumption may contribute to a lower risk of brain cancer development in the Asian population [20]. It is believed that coffee can reduce the incidence of esophageal cancer

through the influence of its anticancer components such as polyphenols and diterpenes. However, these assumptions are uncertain due to inconsistencies in the results of cohort and case-control studies conducted in previous years [21]. The results of research conducted in 2017 by scientists from the Medicine and Oral Surgery Department and Institute of Research and Advanced Training in Health Sciences and Technologies showed an inverse relationship between coffee consumption and oral cancer. The probability of developing the above-mentioned cancer may be even 1.45 lower in people consuming larger amounts of coffee than in the case of people consuming small amounts of coffee or not drinking it at all [22]. Research conducted in 2018 suggests that coffee consumption is not associated with an increased risk of lung cancer [23]. So far, various meta-analyses have been conducted on the relationship between coffee consumption and the endometrial cancer risk. Caffeine has been positively associated with sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG) in postmenopausal women. SHBG is the main carrier of estrogens and testosterone, thus reducing free hormone levels. Another mechanism that can cause lower estrogen levels in the blood after coffee is inhibition of the enzyme that converts androgens into estrogens. It is called CYP19. Low estrogen levels are considered as a protective factor against endometrial cancers by reducing its proliferation. Thus, increased coffee consumption may be associated with a reduced risk of endometrial cancer, especially in obese postmenopausal women [24].

### **Osteoporosis**

Caffeine contained in coffee can lead to a slight negative calcium balance. This is due to impaired calcium absorption [25]. Most studies investigating the effect of coffee on bone mineral density (BMD) showed no correlation between caffeine and BMD. However, one study indicates that daily caffeine intake of more than 300 mg of caffeine may have been associated with accelerated BMD loss [26]. Another study, found that caffeine may have an impact on faster BMD loss only in women whose daily calcium intake was less than 744 mg [27].

### **Depression**

Coffee is one of the most consumed drinks in the world, while depression is considered to be a major contributor to the overall global burden of disease. A 2019 study found that those who consumed at least four cups of coffee a day were at a lower risk of depression than those who drank less than one cup of coffee a day [28]. The mechanism underlying the link between coffee and depression is not fully understood. There are two main hypotheses that can explain it. First, coffee has a high concentration of polyphenols such as chlorogenic acid and trigonelline, which have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects [29]. In this way, coffee can protect against inflammation and oxidation which are involved in the pathogenesis of depression [30]. Secondly, caffeine, being a non-selective adenosine A1 and A2 receptor antagonist, stimulates the central nervous system and modulates dopaminergic activity. A moderate amount of caffeine can have a beneficial effect by improving psychomotor activity and alertness, as well as by the feeling of having more energy [31].

### **Parkinson disease**

Epidemiological evidence suggests that coffee drinkers have a lower risk of Parkinson's disease (PD). According to one hypothesis, PD patients exhibit special personality traits such as caution and lack of search for novelty even before movement symptoms occur. This has led to the suggestion that people who later develop PD are less likely to feel the need for stimulation provided by coffee. Another possible explanation is that caffeine contained in coffee has a neuroprotective effect [32]. Research on the effect of coffee on the development of Parkinson's disease has been going on since the second half of the 20th century. Ascherio

et al. found that men who drank at least 1 cup of coffee per day were less likely to die from PD compared to men who did not drink coffee [33]. Similar results were obtained in the male study population by Ross et al. According to them, men who did not drink coffee had a 3-5 times higher risk of developing PD compared to men who drank at least 800 ml of coffee per day [34]. According to a meta-analysis from 2014, the most positive effect of caffeine was observed for the daily consumption of 3 cups of coffee [35]. Studies by Nurse's Health Study have shown that coffee consumption is inversely correlated with the risk of Parkinson's disease in women who have not undergone postmenopausal estrogen therapy. However, a significant increase in the risk of PD has been observed in postmenopausal women on estrogen therapy who have consumed at least 6 cups of coffee a day [36]. It is not entirely clear how estrogen modifies the effects of caffeine. Caffeine is mainly metabolised by the liver's CYP1A2 enzyme. Estrogens used in hormone replacement therapy inhibit this enzyme, resulting in reduced caffeine metabolism [37]. In the study of Popata et al. the positive correlation between coffee consumption and Parkinson's disease was stronger in subjects with slow caffeine metabolism.[38] Caffeine is thought to have neuroprotective effects by blocking adenosine receptors, leading to increased serotonin and acetylcholine levels [39]. The use of adenosine receptor antagonists may alleviate the symptoms of the disease [40]. Clinical studies on animal models have shown that caffeine stabilizes the integrity of the blood-brain barrier that participates in the maintenance of brain hemostasis. The disruption of brain haemostasis is involved in PD pathogenesis [41]. The positive effect of coffee can also be associated with the polyphenols having antioxidant properties which is very important because oxidative stress is considered as a factor promoting PD [42]. There is also a hypothesis that coffee consumption changes the composition of the intestinal microflora in a way that alleviates enteritis. This would lead to a reduction in the incorrect folding of the alpha-synuclein protein in the intestinal nerves [43]. According to the research,  $\alpha$ -synuclein in the intestinal nerves can act in a prion way, leading to the propagation of neuropathological changes through autonomous connections with the central nervous system. It is believed that a reduced amount of this abnormal protein may reduce the risk of PD [44].

## **Pregnancy**

The results of numerous epidemiological studies that focused on the relationship between coffee consumption by a pregnant woman and the risk of miscarriage were contradictory. Some studies suggest that large amounts of caffeine (350-699 mg / day) increase the risk of pregnancy loss by 40% [45]. There is also a large number of studies with no significant relationship between caffeine intake and pregnancy loss [46,47]. However, caffeine increases the level of cyclic adenosine monophosphate in cells by inhibiting phosphodiesterase, which can affect fetal growth and development [48]. In addition, the caffeine structure is similar to adenine and guanine, so it can be incorporated into DNA during mitosis causing chromosomal anomalies [49]. Similarly to the problem of pregnancy loss, the results of the studies on the influence of caffeine on fetal birth weight are contradictory. Numerous studies indicate that coffee consumption within the range of 200-400 mg / day may result in a reduction of fetal birth weight by about 100 g [50]. Coffee consumption during pregnancy may also be associated with fetal retardation [51]. Prenatal exposure to caffeine has long-term behavioral effects in rats [52]. Unfortunately the effects in humans have been poorly studied so far. Caffeine and its metabolites, including paraxanthin and theophylline are non-selective adenosine antagonists. They affect the activity of the nervous system by blocking adenosine receptors, whose correct modulation influences the formation of axons [53]. One study showed that intensive consumption of caffeine by the mother during pregnancy was associated with increased nighttime awakening of a 3 months baby [54]. Another study found a small relationship between the consumption of coffee during pregnancy and the increased

activity of the 18-month-old child [55]. However, the results of most studies suggest that coffee consumption in the correct amounts does not have a negative effect on pregnancy [56].

### **Diabetes mellitus**

Coffee is the main source of caffeine, which according to research reduces insulin sensitivity and impairs glucose tolerance [57]. It is also a source of a large amount of phenolic compounds, with a total content in the range from 200 mg to 550 mg per cup [58]. The main phenolic compound in coffee is chlorogenic acid, which most likely inhibits the glucose-6-phosphatase system. Hydrolysis of glucose-6-phosphate to glucose and phosphate is the final step in glucose production pathways during gluconeogenesis and glycogenolysis. Hydrolysis of glucose-6-phosphate requires proper operation of a translocase, whose competitive inhibitor in rats liver microsomes is chlorogenic acid [59]. Additionally, studies have shown that chlorogenic acid weakens sodium-dependent glucose transport in brush border membrane vesicles isolated from rat small intestine [60]. The first epidemiological report suggesting a link between coffee consumption and type 2 diabetes appeared in 2002. Since then, the number of studies has been steadily increasing. A study in the Dutch population found that the risk of developing type 2 diabetes was half as high in men and women who drink at least seven cups of coffee compared to people who drink no more than two cups of coffee a day [61]. In Finland, however, research showed that men who drank at least 10 cups of coffee a day had a 55% lower risk of developing 2DM than men who drink a maximum of 2 cups per day [62]. Studies on the impact of coffee on the development of type 1 diabetes are significantly less numerous. This is mainly due to the age of people suffering from this type of diabetes. Usually these are children or young adults with lower coffee consumption.

### **SUMMARY**

Coffee is one of the most popular drinks in the world, which is why it is so important to study its impact on health. Numerous studies suggest that its impact on the long-term functioning of the organism is negligible and is associated with the consumption of coffee for a longer period of time. The results show that its ingredients can have both positive and negative effects on health. Chlorogenic acid, caffeine and trigonelline are primarily responsible for the positive effect. They have a hypoglycemic, bactericidal and antioxidant effect. They also have neuroprotective properties. Diterpenes, such as kahweol and cafestol, which cause an increase in blood cholesterol levels, may have a negative influence on health. However, these compounds also have advantages, they act chemoprotectively. Research suggests that coffee can reduce the risk of Parkinson's disease and type 2 diabetes. However, before these observations can be used to create nutritional advice, further research is needed. They will allow a better understanding of the mechanisms of action of the compounds responsible for the above-mentioned effects.

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