

## Q &amp; A

Lately I've heard my coffee habit might actually be good for me. It's hard to believe, but can it be true?

BY MICHAEL A. MILLER

**W**ith the days waning and projects at work unremitting, it can be an easy decision to reach for that sixth cuppa joe.

After all, there's still dinner to make, homework to help with, and kids to put to bed—and you haven't even triumphed over the evening commute yet. On top of that, you might be worrying how your excessive coffee drinking could impact your health. We spoke with Bob Arnot, MD, who has reported on coffee's ill effects but converted after executing his own research on the amazing ways coffee is a boon to your physical and mental health.

**NATURAL SOLUTIONS:** *You have reported on the supposed ill effects of drinking coffee. What did you say?*

**BOB ARNOT, MD:** For my whole career, we were always on the lookout for the next story on why coffee was bad for you—heart disease, or cancer, or stomach ulcers. The intriguing thing is, until they had a big enough number of people, they could never sort it out because coffee drinking was more a marker for people who drank and smoked or were overweight or maybe had diabetes and smoked and did all of these bad things, so it looked like coffee had to be bad for you.

The turning point, as always in medicine, is that somebody does a landmark article. In the *New England Journal of Medicine*, they found a clean cohort there where nobody drank, smoked, or did

anything bad, and they found this astonishing 15-percent decrease in all kinds of death for women and 10 percent for men drinking a lot of coffee, 6 cups for men and 4 cups for women.

**NS:** *What are the benefits of coffee? What can it protect against? What are the mechanisms it uses?*

**DR. ARNOT:** The driving force behind so many diseases is inflammation. People get heart disease; a huge driving force is inflammation. It takes six weeks with a diet to be able to improve inflammatory status, if you're looking at C-reactive protein (CRP), which is a good marker. It takes probably two and a half or three weeks before you see changes in cholesterol. What really struck me, in doing some studies into coffee and endothelial cell function, is that in 2 to 4 hours you have changes, which is unbelievable. You get real changes in inflammation and antioxidants, so it appears that beverages are very much more powerful than foods in terms of being able to help you with clearing blood sugar, absorbing fats, overall cardiovascular health, and overall mental status.

When people ask, "Why would this be so good for you?" The answer appears to be the polyphenols. When people say, "What the hell is a polyphenol?" I say it's the same thing that makes fresh fruits, vegetables, red wine, green cheese, and olive oil healthy for you, only there are more of them in coffee in the American diet than in the food. Coffee appears to just be a spectacular delivery mechanism.

**NS:** *Are polyphenols more bioavailable in coffee than other natural sources?*

**DR. ARNOT:** Well, there are higher amounts of them than in other natural sources. You get many more antioxidants from coffee than other things in the American diet. Now, it may be that we have such a poor diet and that's part of the reason. In other words, people could be eating phenomenal amounts of wild blueberries, but we have looked at green tea, wild blueberries, and olive oil, and in terms of the polyphenols, coffee is king.

There's a study that measured the amount of polyphenols in a cup of coffee from a low of 6 mg to a high of 188 mg in a cup. This is probably part of the reason that people have to drink so much coffee is that there's just not much in many of the consumer coffees that people drank. In the coffees that we've been playing with, we've gotten up to 396 mg of these polyphenols in a cup.

**NS:** *Why is there such a gamut of polyphenol content among coffees?*

**DR. ARNOT:** The reason that these particular coffees have so many more polyphenols is the bean is a better varietal. Coffee is divided into Arabica and Robusta. Within Arabica, you have trees like the Bourbon and then you have one called an SL-28, which is the best varietal.

Then you need a microenvironment. For instance, in Kenya, between Mount Kenya and the Aberdares, there's high-ionizing radiation, it's cold, it's high, it's rainy, it's cloudy, it's windy, the bean is

ultimately stressed and so it produces phenomenal amounts of polyphenols.

**NS:** *How do you make sure a coffee has the highest antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits?*

**DR. ARNOT:** It's not just having the right varietal, it's not just being in the right microenvironment, it's also great farmers with great soil, farming practices, and development practices. Afterwards, how do you dry? How long do you dry it for? Wonderful farming techniques count, and the great thing from my vantage point is that these farmers are being rewarded with much higher prices so that they can then afford to build better schools for their kids and enjoy better healthcare.

**NS:** *Considering the range in coffee quality, how do consumers know whether they're buying a good anti-inflammatory coffee at the super-market?*

**DR. ARNOT:** They're probably not. We've looked at a lot of the grocery store coffees, there's not much you find that even lists a varietal. There are a couple of super high-end grocery stores where they may list a particular town it's in, but by and large it's going to say "breakfast blend," or "morning blend," or "wake me," so you have no idea.

There are two routes. One, we have the Dr. Danger coffee and this Daktari coffee, and we wanted to do everything for the consumer. Take the bean, roast it the right way, test it to make sure that it has the highest polyphenols, and send it to Coffee Review to make sure it had the best taste. Route one is, you can go to Amazon and buy Daktari or Dr. Danger.

Route two is, in terms of general advice, to look for a high-altitude coffee. Go to [coffeereview.com](http://coffeereview.com), which is an independent third-party site, and look for coffees that get readings in the 90s, that's your best bet, and look for light roast. **NS**

## Roasting Rules

The more heat coffee beans are subjected to, the darker the roast. The darker the roast, the less surviving polyphenols. Compounding the problem is Americans' affinity for the tarnished flavor of bitter dark roast camouflaged by sashes of milk, spoons of sugar, and gobs of whipped cream that only further degrade the already bereft-of-polyphenols beverage. So why not enjoy the benefits of a high anti-inflammatory load and indulge in coffee's 1200 fascinating flavor components? (Red wine only has 700). Coffees roasting temperatures are below:

Lightest roast: **380 degrees**

Light roast: **400 degrees**

Destruction of coffee's main polyphenol: **407 degrees**

Medium roast: **410 degrees**

Dark roast: **425 degrees**

## Conclusions on Caffeine

So polyphenols are the pinnacle of coffee health benefits, but what about the other elephant in the cup—caffeine? This jittery ingredient is a double-edged sword: In terms of human performance, "there's no question you'll go further, faster," said Dr. Arnot. Caffeine also improves memory, concentration, and attention. Furthermore, "there is some belief that caffeine displaces beta-amyloid, a receptor in the brain, and it may be the mechanism why there's less Alzheimer's found in patients who have life-long coffee drinking habits," added Dr. Arnot.

Yet, caffeine can cause irritating symptoms like anxiety, stress, elevated blood pressure, elevated heart rate, and inability to sleep. This all depends, of course, on how much caffeine you drink and when you drink it, but there's more to it than that. If you have a genetic mutation called CYP1B21F, you metabolize caffeine much slower than others. This may limit you to 1-2 cups before 11 a.m., whereas you'll need to drink 4-5 to realize coffee's benefits. The answer lies in a good cup of decaf! While there aren't many out there, Dr. Arnot maintains that you can still score all of the bushy tailed benefits of coffee's polyphenols with none of the wide-eyed stress.

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