Coffee, Especially Large Amounts, Can Lower Risk of Liver Disease

Daily coffee consumption was associated with lower risk of cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver-related death, according to a new study.

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Your morning cup of joe may lower your risk of liver disease or liver cancer. A large study published in Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology found that higher coffee intake was associated with better liver health. One cup of coffee a day was linked to a lower risk of cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver-related death, but five or more cups a day were associated with the greatest reductions in risk.

"Previous studies suggested that coffee might benefit the liver, but most were smaller or looked at only one piece of the puzzle," said hepatologist Hyunseok Kim, MD, MPH, PhD, assistant professor of Medicine at Cedars-Sinai and corresponding author of the study, in a press release. "We followed hundreds of thousands of people for more than a decade and looked at their health outcomes along with liver MRI scans and blood protein analyses. Together, those findings help explain the biological mechanisms behind coffee's association with better liver health."

The human body's second-largest organ after the skin, the liver plays an essential role in the body's filtration system, removing toxins and waste products from the bloodstream and storing important nutrients, like vitamins and minerals. Every year, two million lives are lost to liver disease worldwide; currently, 4.5 million Americans are living with chronic liver disease.

Over time, chronic hepatitis B, hepatitis C, heavy alcohol consumption and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) can lead to serious liver complications, including cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), the most common type of liver cancer.

To learn more about chronic liver disease, read Hep's Basics on Liver Health.

In the coffee study, researchers followed 354,957 adults without cirrhosis or HCC for 13 years. The

participants reported coffee intake through a survey, and researchers tracked new diagnoses of cirrhosis, hepatocellular carcinoma and liver-related deaths through medical records.

As consumption increased, the protective effects of coffee also increased. People who drank one to two cups of coffee a day had a 20% lower risk of cirrhosis, 24% lower risk of liver cancer and 31% lower risk of liver-related death compared with those who did not drink coffee. Those who drank three to four cups daily had a 35% lower risk of cirrhosis and liver cancer and a 41% lower risk of liver-related death.

People who drank five or more cups of coffee a day had a 32% lower risk of cirrhosis, 47% lower risk of liver cancer and a 42% lower risk of liver-related death compared with those who did not drink coffee. MRI scans also revealed lower levels of fat, liver iron, fibrosis and liver inflammation in those who drank more coffee. Blood tests showed coffee drinkers had higher proteins tied to liver function and lower levels of proteins linked to scarring and inflammation.

“Our findings support moderate coffee consumption for people who already enjoy and tolerate it well,” said study senior author Ju Dong Yang, MD, medical director of the Liver Cancer Program at Cedars-Sinai. “However, we would not recommend that someone begin drinking coffee solely for liver protection based on this study alone. Prevention should continue to focus on maintaining a healthy weight, limiting alcohol, exercising regularly and managing blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol.”

To learn more about the effects of drinking coffee, click #Coffee.

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