

DC Online

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Coffee to Prevent Parkinson's

A new study of over 8,000 men suggests that coffee drinkers are less susceptible to Parkinson's disease.¹ The study, from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Honolulu, found that non-coffee drinkers were five times more likely to develop the disorder than those who drank about five cups each day. The researchers suspect that caffeine is the factor that offers protection.

1. *JAMA*, May 24, 2000.

Coffee and Rheumatoid Arthritis

A Finnish study of coffee drinkers suggests a link between rheumatoid arthritis and coffee consumption. This study found a direct relationship between the amounts of coffee consumed each day and blood levels of rheumatoid factor (RF). Researchers monitored the coffee consumption of nearly 7,000 people over 15 years and found that those drinking 11 or more cups per day were 15 times more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis.²

2. *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*, July 2000.

Patient Recovery

Researchers from the University of Chicago report that patients in intensive care wards recover sooner and can get off life support machines earlier if they're allowed to awaken from their sedative-induced sleep at least once per day. The improvement rate was about 30 percent faster in these patients, which can translate into much lower costs and patient survival, according to the authors of the study. Less time on ventilators and other such machinery leads to lower exposure to potential problems such as pneumonia, blood clots and lung injury from ventilation units. The study was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.³

3. *NEJM*, May 18, 2000.

Clot Busters in the Elderly

Contradicting conventional medical wisdom, a study from Johns Hopkins University concludes that the clot-dissolving drugs given to heart attack victims are not only ineffective for patients over 75 years old, they may actually be causing more to die. The study involved more than 7,800 Medicare patients between the ages of 65 and 86. Patients past the age of 75 died almost 40 percent more

often when given such drugs. Deaths were due mostly to bleeding, strokes, or ruptured hearts.⁴

4. *Circulation*, May 2000.

An Aspirin a Day Keeps Clotting Away

British doctors investigating the use of a daily aspirin tablet for heart patients warn that the practice is not a good idea for everyone. While they found a benefit in men with low blood pressure, those with higher readings were more likely to die if they were on the regimen. The reason, they say, is because the aspirin leads to more internal bleeding and strokes in these individuals. The study involved 5,500 middle-aged men over a seven-year period.⁵

5. *British Medical Journal*, July 1, 2000.

Pain-Free Heart Attacks

A study at the University of Alabama in Birmingham of over 400,000 patients with confirmed myocardial infarctions has found that one-third of these patients did not experience the crushing chest pain that the public associates with a heart attack. As a result, many did not seek immediate treatment and were about twice as likely to die.⁶ On average, it took about two hours longer for these patients to get to the hospital. Other symptoms that may indicate a heart attack include pain or discomfort in the back, jaw, neck, shoulder, arm or stomach; shortness of breath; sweating; irregular heart rhythms; fainting spells; general weakness; and sudden indigestion.⁷

6. *JAMA*, June 28, 2000.

7. *Reuters*, June 27, 2000.

Exercise for Congestive Heart Failure

A German study⁸ suggests that a strictly controlled exercise regimen can produce positive results in patients suffering from congestive heart failure (CHF). In this six-month study, 73 men in their mid-50s who experienced CHF were randomly assigned to either an inactive group or a group that spent about 20 minutes on an exercise bicycle each day. At the end of the study, the researchers measured improved circulation, resting heart rate, and pumping capacity in the exercise group. This group also showed a small but statistically significant decrease in heart size.

8. *JAMA*, June 21, 2000.

The Dangers of Walking

A variety of studies recently have suggested a number of health benefits of mild-to-moderate exercise, such as a daily brisk walk. However, a new study highlights one of the risks involved in your evening stroll: automobiles. A study released recently by the Washington-based

environmentalist group Surface Transportation Policy Project ranks 47 metropolitan areas in the United States according to a "pedestrian danger index" taken from an analysis of federal data on pedestrian traffic injuries from 1997 and 1998. According to their report, the most dangerous city in which to take a walk is Tampa, Florida. The problem, they say, is too few or inadequate sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian-friendly amenities. You may recall that not too long ago Tampa was also named the most dangerous city in which to ride a bicycle. Following Tampa, other cities where pedestrians need to be especially alert are Atlanta, Miami, Orlando, and Jacksonville. The safest cities are Pittsburgh, Boston and Rochester, N.Y.⁹

9. Associated Press, June 15, 2000.

Drug Warnings Unheeded

A growing number of pharmaceutical drugs are being withdrawn from the market not because they cannot be safely used, but because doctors are ignoring safety guidelines, says the FDA. Apparently, the warning labels the FDA requires are not being read by prescribing physicians, and patients are dying as a result. For example, the drug Propulsid had recently been linked to 80 deaths; most of these were patients for whom the prescribing information label warned the drug would be too dangerous to use. One expert testified to an FDA panel that he believed less than one percent of physicians have read a drug label in the past year.¹⁰

10. *Reuters*, June 15, 2000.

Exercise and Strokes

A recent issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*¹¹ reports that a moderate amount of exercise each day can decrease a person's risk of stroke considerably. Based on six years of data from more than 72,000 women, the study says a brisk 30-minute walk each day can reduce the stroke risk by 30 percent. More intense exercise produced the same benefit: no more, no less. The authors of the study defined "brisk" as maintaining a speed of about three miles per hour, or about 1-1/2 miles over the 30-minute period. Both types of strokes (ischemic and hemorrhagic) were less frequent with exercise.

11. *JAMA*, June 14, 2000.

Sodas and Bones

A Harvard study of teenage girls¹² suggests that carbonated beverages, especially colas, may weaken bone structure. Among 460 ninth and tenth-grade girls, broken bones occurred three times as often if they drank any kind of soda routinely, but cola drinkers broke bones five times as often. The researchers speculated that the phosphoric acid in the popular drinks may weaken bones, or perhaps the sodas displaced drinks that might offer more nutrition.

12. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, June 2000.

Infant Mortality and Time of Birth

A German study reports that babies born during the daytime survive better than those born during the night. After analyzing the outcomes of more than 380,000 births during the 1990s, researchers discovered that babies born at night were nearly twice as likely to die within a week as those born during the day. The researchers blame the increased death rate on inexperienced or fatigued hospital staff members and doctors. Similar findings have been reported in Wales and Scotland.¹³

13. Reuters, July 27, 2000, reporting on researcher from Philipps University in Marburg led by Dr Gunther Heller.

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