

## Coffee buzz: Study finds java drinkers live longer

By: AP

Source From: The Deccan Herald

Dated: 18/05/2012

MILWAUKEE — One of life's simple pleasures just got a little sweeter. After years of waffling research on coffee and health, even some fear that java might raise the risk of heart disease, a big study finds the opposite: Coffee drinkers are a little more likely to live longer. Regular or decaf doesn't matter.

The study of 400,000 people is the largest ever done on the issue, and the results should reassure any coffee lovers who think it's a guilty pleasure that may do harm.

"Our study suggests that's really not the case," said lead researcher Neal Freedman of the National Cancer Institute. "There may actually be a modest benefit of coffee drinking."

No one knows why. Coffee contains a thousand things that can affect health, from helpful antioxidants to tiny amounts of substances linked to cancer. The most widely studied ingredient — caffeine — didn't play a role in the new study's results.

It's not that earlier studies were wrong. There is evidence that coffee can raise LDL, or bad cholesterol, and blood pressure at least short-term, and those in turn can raise the risk of heart disease.

Even in the new study, it first seemed that coffee drinkers were more likely to die at any given time. But they also tended to smoke, drink more alcohol, eat more red meat and exercise less than non-coffee-drinkers. Once researchers took those things into account, a clear pattern emerged: Each cup of coffee per day nudged up the chances of living longer.

Careful, though — this doesn't prove that coffee makes people live longer, only that the two seem related. Like most studies on diet and health, this one was based strictly on observing people's habits and resulting health. So it can't prove cause and effect.

But with so many people, more than a decade of follow-up and enough deaths to compare, "this is probably the best evidence we have" and are likely to get, said Dr. Frank Hu of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Other research ties coffee drinking to lower levels of markers for inflammation and insulin resistance. Researchers also considered that people in poor health might refrain from drinking coffee and whether their abstention could bias the results. But the study excluded people with cancer and heart disease — the most common health problems — to minimize this chance. Also, the strongest benefits of coffee drinking were seen in people who were healthiest when the study began.

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