

HEALTHY EATING

Empanada Day (April 8)



An empanada is a stuffed bread or pastry that is fried or baked and served in many Latin American countries. The filling can consist of a variety of meats, vegetables and even fruits.

Coffee Drinkers Have Clearer Arteries

Scientists may now better understand at least one way in which coffee could help to protect against cardiovascular disease. A large new Korean study reports that people drinking three to five cups of coffee daily were 41% less likely to show signs of coronary artery calcium than non-coffee drinkers. This calcification is an early indicator of the artery-clogging plaques (atherosclerosis) that cause coronary artery disease, which afflicts nearly 16 million Americans.

"I found this report to be quite interesting because coronary artery calcium is a subclinical marker of atherosclerosis, evident even in asymptomatic young adults," comments Jeffrey Blumberg, PhD, director of Tufts' HNRCA Antioxidants Research Laboratory, who has studied the health effects of the phytochemical compounds in coffee. "This study is also useful because there has been little previous information on coronary artery calcium and coffee, and the study has strength because of its large sample size.

"On the other hand," Blumberg cautions, "this is a cross-sectional study and so has marked limitations with regard to inferring causality. It is also worth noting that this study was conducted in Korea, which has a different dietary pattern than Western countries."

The findings should in any case perk up coffee drinkers, many of whom grew up hearing that their favorite beverage was bad for you. The recent report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Committee for the first time addressed safety concerns about coffee, concluding that drinking three to five cups a day (up to about 400 milligrams of caffeine) was associated with minimal health risks. The experts also noted observational studies indicating that coffee intake is associated with lower risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.



ENOUGH, NOT TOO MUCH: The new Korean study, published in *Heart*, may help explain one mechanism by which coffee benefits the cardiovascular system. Previous studies, the researchers noted, have linked coffee consumption to improved insulin sensitivity and reduced oxidation of LDL cholesterol (oxidation makes these particles more dangerous). Findings on coffee and coronary artery calcium, however, have been mixed, possibly because prior studies had a lag time of seven to eight years between measures of coffee intake and subsequent calcification.

Yuni Choi, MD, of Sungkyunkwan University, and colleagues assessed coffee intake among 25,138 participants, average age 41.3, with no symptoms of heart disease. The study group, a majority of whom were male, averaged 1.8 cups of coffee a day. At the same time, participants underwent CT scans to measure coronary artery calcium. Overall, even though the study group was relatively young, 13.4% showed signs of at least some calcification.

People who reported drinking an average of three to five cups of coffee a day were least likely to have calcification. Risk fell with increasing consumption from less one cup a day to one to three cups, to three to five cups - a "dose-response" pattern that lends credence to the findings. But people drinking more than five cups of coffee daily actually saw greater risk than moderate coffee drinkers, a trend researchers could not explain.

The associations between moderate coffee consumption and reduced coronary artery calcium risk

persisted even after adjusting for a variety of other variables. Coffee drinkers at all levels of consumption were at lower risk than non-coffee drinkers. The study did not differentiate between regular and decaf coffee.

POUR CHOICES: Should these and other findings about coffee's health benefits lead non-coffee consumers to take up the habit? Tufts' Blumberg says, "There are many healthy beverages from which to choose, including water, tea and fruit juices. While it now appears that coffee can fit into this group, if you do choose to drink coffee, go easy on the cream and sugar, whose saturated fat and calories can outweigh any possible benefits." Coffeehouse concoctions, too, can be more like drinking a milkshake than sipping plain coffee.

Source: Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter

ASPARAGUS WITH TOASTED ALMONDS & GARLIC

Makes 4 Servings



Ingredients:

- 3 /4 pound asparagus
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 /4 cup slivered almonds
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 Tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon unsalted butter
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Boil 1 inch of water in a large skillet.
2. Add asparagus and cook until tender and bright green, about 3 minutes.
3. Drain and pat dry.
4. On high heat, add oil to skillet.
5. Add almonds and stir for 30 seconds.
6. Add asparagus, garlic, salt, and pepper.
7. Cook until garlic and almonds are golden and asparagus begins to brown, about 4 minutes.
8. Stir in vinegar and butter.
9. Season with salt and pepper as desired.

Yummy Roasted Broccoli and Red Peppers

- 5 cups fresh broccoli florets (about 1 large bunch)
- 1 red bell pepper, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 2 teaspoons olive or vegetable oil
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper
- 1 clove garlic, minced

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Add broccoli, pepper, oil, lemon pepper and garlic to a self-sealing plastic bag; shake until ingredients are combined (or mix together in a bowl).
3. Spread the mixture out in an even layer on a baking sheet.
4. Bake in the preheated oven until vegetables are tender enough to pierce with a fork, 15 to 20 minutes. Makes 6 servings. Each serving contains 38 calories, 2 grams fat, 54 mg sodium, 5 grams carbohydrate & 2 grams fiber.



Cook's notes: Feel free to use a combination of other vegetables such as cauliflower, carrots, Brussels sprouts, etc. Encourage young children to help by shaking the bag of veggies and placing on a baking sheet.