What’s the Scoop on Coffee?

Coffee typically refers to the drink made from the roasted beans of a coffee tree. The two main coffee trees used in the commercial industry are Coffea arabica and Coffea canephora. Coffea arabica represents about 70 percent of the world’s coffee production, and it tends to be higher in price and lower in caffeine. The other most common type, Coffea canephora, makes up 30 percent of the world’s market and is used mainly for blends and instant coffees. It has a more distinctive taste than arabica and around 50 to 60 percent more caffeine. Roasting the beans brings out the aroma and flavor and readies them to be ground and brewed.

According to Penn State Extension’s publication Creating Health & Nutrition there are a variety of ways to prepare and serve coffee. A typical “cup” of coffee is considered to be from 6 to 8 ounces. The caffeine content varies by preparation and type but an 8 ounce cup of ‘undressed’ brewed coffee could contain between 75 and 200 milligrams, 1 ounce of espresso 45-75 milligrams, and instant varieties could have between 27-173 milligrams.

Coffee can also be served “decaffeinated”, while keeping the taste and smell at their original levels. Four methods of decaffeinating coffee exist today: indirect solvent process, direct solvent process, Swiss water process, and carbon dioxide process. Indirect and direct solvent processes use the FDA-approved chemicals, the Swiss water process uses water, and the carbon dioxide process uses carbon dioxide to remove the caffeine from the coffee beans. Decaffeinated coffee still contains 2 to 4 milligrams of caffeine in an 8-ounce cup.

Research shows that when used appropriately, coffee can be a safe, enjoyable, and even beneficial brew.

While coffee is a complex plant with many different features, one of its active ingredients is caffeine. Drinking coffee, particularly because of its caffeine content, may be of concern for some health conditions or situations. However, despite potential concerns, studies show that drinking 1 to 5 cups of coffee per day may prove beneficial for your health and does not cause increased risk for death. Chlorogenic acid and other antioxidant substances may be the active ingredients in coffee associated with lower rates of heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. Other substances in coffee, including kahweol, cafestol, lignans, and even caffeine, may lower the risk of certain cancers. The exact mechanisms of coffee to produce its health benefits remain mostly unknown. Although it is not necessarily recommended that everyone switch from their Earl Grey tea to a cup of java (coffee), some studies have found that coffee may provide some benefit.

Currently, no U.S. Dietary Guidelines exist for the exact amount each person should or should not be drinking. For the casual enjoyer of this brew, a general guideline is to reduce the amount if experiencing signs of drinking too much, such as tremors, sleeping problems, feeling stressed, increased heart rate, or feeling uncomfortable.

Specialty coffee-based drinks are common, but they can be high in sugar, fat, and calories. For those who are not black-coffee purists, these can be enjoyed as a healthier treat by choosing low-fat milk options, sugar-free syrups, or smaller portion sizes. To see if drinking coffee may be enjoyable and beneficial for your lifestyle and health needs, try making and experimenting with your own coffee drinks at home. It will also be cheaper!

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Nancy Frecks
Extension Educator
SW 3 Counties
Dundy-Hayes-Hitchcock
nfrecks1@unl.edu
308 334 5666 Hitchcock