Dear Alice,

I just recently switched to decaf coffee, and someone told me that it can affect cholesterol levels? Is this true? Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Why did the coffee bean cross the road? To get to his daily grind!* Research has shown that coffee (both decaf and caffeinated) can temporarily increase blood cholesterol levels, which can contribute to an increased risk of heart disease. However, this primarily applies to frequent coffee drinkers (those who sip more than four cups per day) and people with an already heightened risk of developing heart disease.

Before you shut off your coffee maker, it is important to get the facts straight: the cholesterol-raising effect of coffee is actually due to the type of bean used, and not the caffeine content. Decaffeinated coffee is often derived from Robusta beans, which may have slightly higher cholesterol-raising effects. Unlike Arabica beans (generally used for caffeinated coffee), Robusta beans are reported to have a greater ability to stimulate fatty acid production in the body.

In addition, both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee beans contain the chemical compounds cafestrol and kahweol. These compounds can disrupt the body’s natural regulatory process. Although the exact chemical pathway is still being researched, preliminary findings suggest that cafestrol and kahweol interfere with hormone receptors specific to lipid metabolism and detoxification in the blood stream. This interference can lead to an increase in cholesterol levels.

Experiencing coffee withdrawal already? Not to worry ? research has shown that filtering your coffee (no matter the bean type or caffeine level) can minimize any effects on blood cholesterol levels. This is because filters (both paper and mesh) can retain the chemical compounds in the coffee beans that interfere with our cholesterol levels. The same applies to coffee pods. Therefore, unfiltered coffee (such as Scandinavian and Turkish varieties) may have greater effects on cholesterol levels.

While research has been conclusive about the effects of cafestrol and kahweol on cholesterol levels, remember ? these effects are temporary, and often only apparent in people who drink more than 4 cups per day. Sticking to filtered coffee and keeping your consumption down can
minimize the cholesterol-raising effects. Enjoy!

Alice!
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Nutrition & Physical Activity
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