

Coffee: an Unexpected Cholesterol-Raising Factor

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SUMMARY

The first experiment on coffee and cholesterol is mentioned in 1970. The author claimed that refraining from coffee reduced the total cholesterol level by 17%. Ten out of 24 studies, involving nearly 110,000 subjects, demonstrated a significant positive relationship between coffee consumption and serum cholesterol for both sexes. In the remaining 14 studies, the evidence for a link between coffee and cholesterol is less clear-cut. An extensive meta-analysis including the 24 cross-sectional studies showed that the beta-coefficient or increase in total cholesterol per cup of coffee was 0.008 mmol/l in populations consuming filtered brews, whereas the corresponding figure was 0.038 mmol/l for those drinking unfiltered (boiled) coffee. This observation has been confirmed by experiments conducted in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. In these experiments it was shown that brewing methods involving filtering resulted in only a very slight increase in cholesterol levels compared to that of the unfiltered brew. Zock et al. in Wageningen concluded that there is a lipid raising factor in coffee, which must be a powerful naturally occurring substance. It is also reasonable to conclude that filtering might retain this substance as the brewing methods seem to be of such importance. This finding, that brewing methods really do play a role may explain why there are national and regional differences in the cholesterol raising effect of coffee.