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# Wellness Wire

SPRING  
2011

Published by CARE's WorkLife Solutions to help employees with life management issues



## Are You Concerned About Coffee?

The good news is, it may actually be good for you. Because it tastes so good, you may assume coffee is bad for you. Maybe you've heard rumors that your morning brew causes everything from heart disease to cancer. But researchers are finding that coffee poses little to no health risk for most people. Not only that, coffee drinking might even have some health benefits.

Early research hinted that coffee might have some harmful effects. But most of those studies searched for links between people's habits and their overall health. In such studies, it's hard to know which effects come from coffee and which just show up by coincidence. Heavy coffee drinking sometimes goes hand in hand with unhealthy habits, like smoking and a less active lifestyle.

Coffee beans are seeds and, like all seeds, they're loaded with compounds to protect the plant's next generation. "Coffee is an amazingly potent collection of biologically active compounds," says Dr. Walter C. Willett of the Harvard School of Public Health.

*Caffeine* is probably the most well-known compound in coffee. It can make you feel more awake and alert, which is why most people drink coffee in the first place. But too much can be harmful. In fact, according to Willett, caffeine causes the most common problem reported by coffee drinkers, which is trouble sleeping. Caffeine can also blunt your appetite and cause headaches, dizziness, nervousness, and irritability.

If you're sensitive to caffeine, Willett says, simply drink less of it. If you have trouble falling asleep at night, make sure to avoid it later in the day.

Caffeine is mildly addictive, so you might get headaches, drowsiness, irritability, nausea, and other symptoms if you suddenly cut back. You can avoid these effects, though, by gradually reducing your caffeine intake.

"There's some evidence that high amounts of caffeine during pregnancy may cause problems with the pregnancy," says Dr. Jared Reis of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. That's why doctors recommend that pregnant women cut back on coffee and other caffeinated beverages.

Studies also suggest that caffeine may interfere with *calcium* absorption. Calcium is an important nutrient for growing and maintaining strong bones. Make sure you get enough calcium in your diet to help reverse this effect.

Overall, says Dr. Rob M. van Dam of Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, "Caffeine doesn't seem to have the wide array of detrimental health effects we first thought it had."

Excerpt from National Institutes of Health. (2009, August). Concerned about coffee? It may actually be good for you. *News in health*. Retrieved December 4, 2009, from <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/>

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## Cholesterol: The Basics

*Cholesterol* is a waxy, fat-like substance found in your body. It is needed for the body to function normally and is found in all cells of the body. Your body makes enough cholesterol for its needs. Cholesterol is carried in the blood in particles called *lipoproteins*. These particles are made up of cholesterol on the inside and protein on the outside.

There are two kinds of lipoproteins:

- **Low-Density Lipoproteins (LDL):** These are the major type of lipoprotein that carries cholesterol in the bloodstream to the body. These are the type that can lead to a buildup of cholesterol in the arteries and lead to heart disease.
- **High-Density Lipoproteins (HDL):** These particles carry cholesterol back to the liver to remove it from the body. Higher levels of HDL are considered good.



An excess of either total or LDL cholesterol in the blood is a risk for heart disease and atherosclerosis. People can have an excess of cholesterol because of diet and because of the rate at which cholesterol is processed in the body. Most of the excess cholesterol comes from diet. Cholesterol can build up on the artery walls of your body. This buildup is called *plaque*. Over time, plaque can cause the arteries to become narrow, which is called *atherosclerosis*. As a result, less oxygen-rich blood can pass through. When the arteries that carry blood to the heart are affected, *coronary artery disease* can result. A *heart attack* occurs when a coronary artery

becomes completely blocked. A coronary artery can become blocked either by plaque buildup or by a plaque that ruptures or bursts which causes a clot. Angina can also develop because of plaque buildup. *Angina* happens when the heart does not receive enough oxygen-rich blood.

High blood cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms, so many people may not know that their cholesterol level is too high. Simple blood tests can be done to check your total, LDL, and HDL cholesterol levels and other types of *fats* in the blood (such as *triglycerides*). If it is found that your cholesterol is high, your doctor may prescribe various treatments depending on your risk for developing heart disease. These include *lifestyle changes* such as diet, weight control, and physical activity. Certain drugs can also be prescribed to manage your cholesterol. Lifestyle changes are usually still recommended with medications. All people can do things to help keep cholesterol within the normal range.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Modified 2007, November 8) *About high blood cholesterol*. Retrieved September 16, 2010, from <http://www.cdc.gov/>



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Accdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttair in what order the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit plcae. The rset can be a total mse and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. This is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. pEtry amzanig huh?

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