Can Coffee Help Prevent Liver Disease?

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If you're a diehard coffee lover, here's another reason to indulge. A study on the effects of coffee and tea on long-term liver health suggests that drinking three or more cups a day of either beverage may help prevent liver fibrosis, or scarring and stiffness of the liver.

Published in the Journal of Hepatology, the new research expands on past data showing that coffee has health benefits for people with elevated liver enzymes, viral hepatitis, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

For this study, researchers at Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam in the Netherlands were curious to see whether coffee and tea would have a protective effect against liver fibrosis in people without any underlying disease.

Looking at data from 2,424 people age 45 and older living in the Netherlands, the researchers found that participants who drank three or more cups of coffee or herbal tea a day had a significantly lower risk of developing liver fibrosis. These results were independent of a multitude of lifestyle factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption and physical activity.

Another recent study, published online in BMJ Open, found that drinking even one cup of coffee each day can reduce the risk of hepatocellular cancer (HCC), a type of liver cancer, by 20 percent, while drinking five cups could lower that risk by half.

Researchers at the University of Southampton and the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom reviewed data from 26 observational studies that included more than 2.25 million adult coffee drinkers and nondrinkers. Results showed that the more coffee with caffeine that people consumed, the less likely they were to be diagnosed with HCC, even if they had preexisting liver disease. Decaffeinated coffee also lowered the risk of HCC but to a lesser extent.

The researchers suggested that antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and anticarcinogenic compounds in coffee might explain the link between java consumption and a lower risk of liver cancer.

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