Coffee Lowers Risk of Hep C Progression

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People with hepatitis C virus (HCV) who drank three or more cups of coffee per day had a 53 percent lower risk of liver disease progression than those who didn't drink coffee, according to a study published in the November issue of *Hepatology* and reported by ScienceDaily. The people in the study were infected only with HCV and not with both HIV and HCV.

The most serious threat of HCV infection is the progression to liver disease and liver cancer. While HCV treatment can eliminate the virus from the body in some people, it only works about half the time in people infected with HCV genotype 1, which is the most common strain of HCV in the United States. Success rates are significantly lower in people infected with both HIV and HCV. Researchers are thus keen on discovering other factors that might help reduce the risk of liver disease progression, particularly in those who don't respond to HCV treatment.

To determine the impact of coffee and tea consumption on liver disease progression, Neal Freedman, PhD, MPH, from the National Cancer Institute and his colleagues examined data from the 766-patient Hepatitis C Antiviral Long-Term Treatment against Cirrhosis (HALT-C) clinical trial. The participants included in the analysis failed to respond to standard HCV treatment. People were asked about their coffee and tea intake and portion sizes at the study's outset and every three months thereafter. People in the study were followed for an average of 3.8 years and had liver biopsies 1.5 and 3.5 years into the study.

Freedman's team assessed the patients for events signifying liver disease progression, including ascites—accumulation of fluid in the abdomen—death related to liver disease, brain and nervous system damage related to liver disease, liver cancer, and worsening liver scarring.

People who drank three or more cups of coffee per day, the study authors reported, were 53 percent less likely to have liver disease progression than people who drank no coffee. No difference was observed in people who drank tea.

This is not the first study to link coffee consumption with protection against liver damage.

"Given the large number of people affected by HCV, it is important to identify modifiable risk factors associated with the progression of liver disease," Freedman said. "Although we cannot rule out a possible role for other factors that go along with drinking coffee, results from our study

suggest that patients with high coffee intake had a lower risk of disease progression.”

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