Hepatitis Headlines That Make Me Smile

October 1, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Recently, I saw a hepatitis C-related headline that made me smile: 'Coffee, Pot Linked to Lower Mortality From Hepatitis C'. (Gastroenterolgy and Endoscopy News, Aug 30, 2018) I said to myself, "This will make a lot of people happy."

I had a little trouble tracking down the full study, so, I made myself a cup of coffee, and found a related study published in Nutrients in May 2018. This paper was based on a cohort of HIV-HCV co-infected patients in France. Although the intent was to assess the impact of alcohol and coffee on risk of advanced liver fibrosis, the same cohort would yield information about cannabis use. Let's start with the study in Nutrients.

Study: Impact of Alcohol and Coffee Intake on the Risk of Advanced Liver Fibrosis: A Longitudinal Analysis in HIV-HCV Coinfected Patients by Issifou Yaya et al. The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of coffee intake and alcohol consumption on advanced liver fibrosis in HIV-HCV co-infected patients.

Methods: This study followed 1019 HIV-HCV-co-infected subjects for 5 years. Every year, participants completed a self-administered questionnaire that collected information on a number of health-related issues, such as coffee intake, alcohol use, drug use, etc.

Results: These investigators found that high coffee intake (3 cups or more per day) was associated with a significantly reduced risk of advanced liver fibrosis, even in those with high-risk alcohol consumption. (Note: High-risk alcohol use was defined as more than 4 standard size drinks per day for men; 3 per day for women.)

Now let's look at the analysis that includes cannabis. A study using the same cohort was presented in April at the 2018 International Liver Congress hosted by the European Association for the Study of the Liver. The abstract (THU-048) was titled, Protective Effect of Cannabis and Coffee Consumption on HCV-related Mortality in French HIV-HCV Co-Infected Patients by C. Protopopescu, et al.

Study Aims and Results: This study evaluated the effects of cannabis, coffee, alcohol and tobacco used for symptom management by 1,028 HIV-HCV co-infected patients over a median of 5 years. During that time, there were 77 deaths, of which 33 were related to hepatitis C.

Regular/daily cannabis use, drinking ≥3 cups of coffee daily and not smoking were independently

associated with a 68%, 63%, and 64% reduction in HCV-related mortality. Researchers did not find a significant association between alcohol consumption and HCV-mortality risk.

Conclusions: These researchers state that this confirmed the benefits of regular use of coffee. Further, it highlights the possible protective role of cannabis.

My 2-cents: We have seen a great deal of research showing the benefits of coffee, but cannabis research hasn't yielded consistent results. The French have done most of the cannabis research, and have advanced the theory that cannabis is associated with reduced risk of insulin resistance and steatosis, two conditions linked to increased mortality risk. We need more cannabis studies so we can better understand the effect(s) of cannabis on health as a whole, not merely from a liver standpoint.

Based on what I've read so far, if I had liver disease, I wouldn't start using cannabis merely for its potential to protect the liver. However, if I did use it, I wouldn't likely quit unless there was another compelling factor. One thing I am certain of, and that is I will enjoy every cup of coffee I drink. Between the data and the taste, coffee has a lot going for it.

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