

Coffee saves lives? Take this with an ounce of cream

By ACSH Staff — May 17, 2012

Who ever thought that a morning cup of coffee, which so many Americans rely upon in order to jump-start their day, could also forestall a meeting with the Grim Reaper? Well, according to the results of a new prospective study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, [coffee drinking is associated with lower total and cause-specific mortality](#) [1].

As part of the National Institutes of Health-AARP Diet and Health Study, researchers from the National Cancer Institute analyzed data on over 400,000 adults between the ages of 50 and 71 years old who were free of cancer, heart disease, and stroke at the study's onset. Participants' coffee consumption was assessed once at baseline, and they were then followed for up to 14 years. After an adjustment for smoking and other potential confounders, the results showed that men and women who drank an average of four to five cups of coffee daily had the lowest risk of death. And the effect held across a wide variety of causes of death, including heart disease, respiratory disease, stroke, injuries and accidents, diabetes, and infections. Drinking coffee was not, however, associated with a lower risk of dying from cancer.

It seems as though, every few months, we read about another study linking coffee to some sort of health effect, observes ACSH's Alyssa Pelish. Sometimes it's a beneficial effect, sometimes it's adverse but the effects of coffee are a favorite object of scrutiny in these often slightly silly observational studies.

It's true, too, that such studies are often fraught with methodological problems, and the latest one is no exception. The researchers only measured coffee consumption once during this entire study, says ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava. How can you reliably calculate coffee-associated mortality if you've only measured it a single time over 14 years?

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[1] <http://www.latimes.com/health/la-sci-coffee-death-20120517,0,7014507.story>