

# Coffee & Prostate Health

### Q: Can drinking coffee help prevent prostate cancer?

**A:** It appears that the answer is yes. A new study from the Harvard School of Public Health that lasted 22 years says that men who regularly drink coffee—even one to three cups a day--appear to have a lower risk of developing a deadly form of prostate cancer. And it doesn't matter if it's regular or decaf coffee.

Coffee was chosen for this study because the drink has a number of “beneficial compounds” that act as antioxidants, reduce inflammation, and regulate insulin, all of which may influence prostate cancer. Caffeine and phenolic acids in coffee have potent antioxidant activity which can affect glucose metabolism and sex hormone levels. Coffee has been shown in other studies to lower risk for several diseases: Parkinson's, type 2 diabetes, gallstone disease, and liver cancer or cirrhosis.

The Harvard study followed nearly 48,000 men who reported their coffee consumption every four years from 1986 to 2008. The researchers concluded:

- Men who drank the most coffee (six or more cups daily) had nearly a 20% lower risk of developing any form of prostate cancer.
- Men who drank the most coffee had a 60% lower risk of developing prostate cancer that leads to death or spreads to the bones.
- The lowered risk does not seem to be related to caffeine, because the men drank decaffeinated or regular coffee.
- Even drinking one to three cups of coffee per day was associated with a

30% lower risk of lethal prostate cancer.

- Although coffee drinkers were more likely to smoke and less likely to exercise, these lifestyle behaviors were taken into consideration and still coffee was associated with a lower risk of prostate cancer.

Many men worry about the prevalence of prostate cancer because it is the most frequently diagnosed form of cancer in America, and the second leading cause of cancer death in men. One in six men is affected by prostate cancer in his lifetime. Today, there are more than 2 million men in America who have survived prostate cancer.

The Harvard researchers said they don't understand yet how risk factors for prostate cancer can be controlled to lower the risk of deadly prostate cancer, but this study suggests that “coffee could represent one modifiable factor that may lower the risk of developing the most harmful form of prostate cancer.”

This is not to say that men can rely on coffee drinking to spare them from prostate cancer. This new study needs to be validated through additional studies, and researchers say they need to learn more about specific mechanisms by which coffee lowers the risk of prostate cancer.

No one is prepared to conclusively link coffee with reduced risk for prostate cancer, but the Harvard researchers said, “We observed a strong inverse association between coffee consumption and risk of lethal prostate cancer. The association appears to be related to non-caffeine components of coffee.” To read more about this research, go to <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/>



