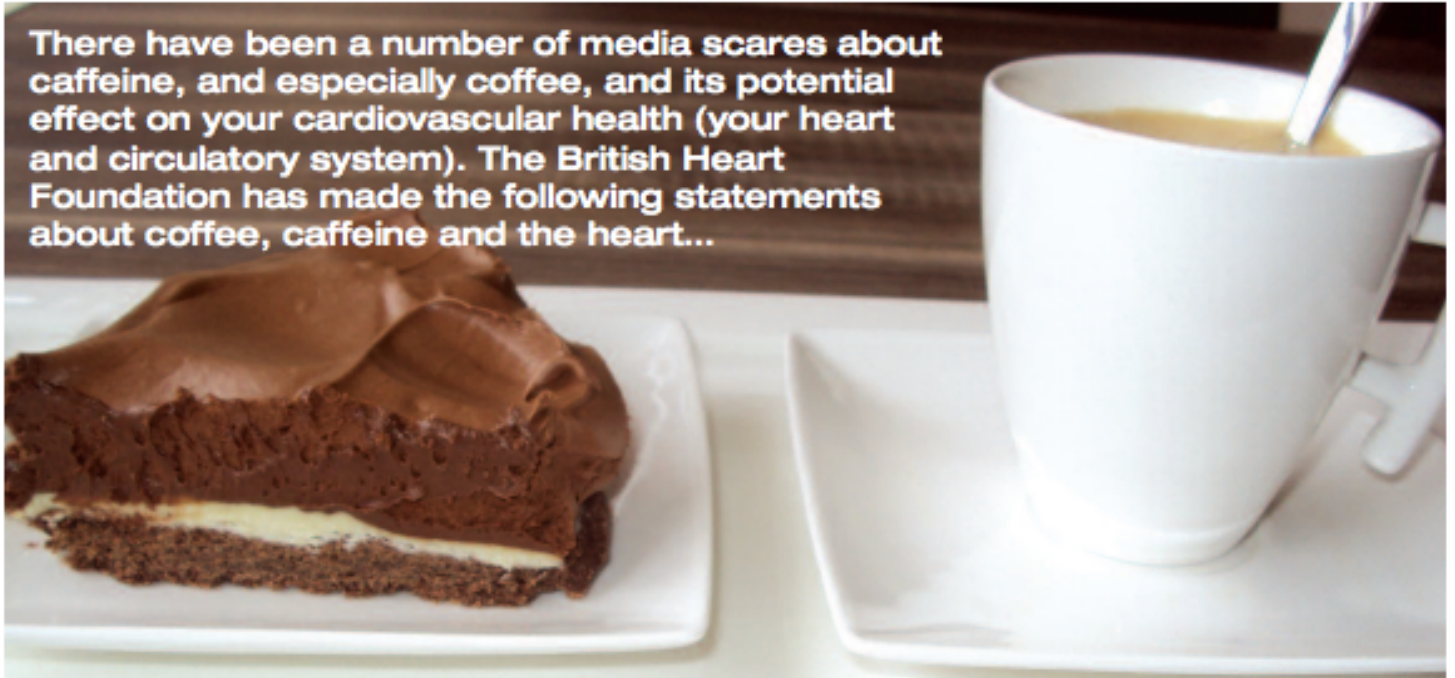


# Healthy eating

## Caffeine and my health

There have been a number of media scares about caffeine, and especially coffee, and its potential effect on your cardiovascular health (your heart and circulatory system). The British Heart Foundation has made the following statements about coffee, caffeine and the heart...



### **British Heart Foundation**

#### **What's wrong with coffee and caffeine?**

The concern that coffee drinking could influence the development of coronary heart disease, heart attacks or arrhythmias has led to many research papers over the last few decades. Whether there is any link is difficult to study as people who drink a lot of coffee may also be more likely to smoke and be physically inactive and eat an increased amount of saturated fat, which means that they may already have other risk factors for coronary heart disease

#### **Is there a link between caffeine and coronary heart disease?**

Several studies have examined the possible link between drinking caffeinated drinks and atherosclerosis (or furring up of the arteries serving the heart) and the results have varied. Drinking a moderate amount of coffee, for example, does not appear to influence coronary heart disease.

#### **What about abnormal heart rhythms?**

The general conclusion from experts is that moderate amounts of coffee or caffeinated drinks do not lead to abnormal heart rhythms and should not increase your risk. If you have an abnormal heart rhythm, limiting your caffeine intake is not likely to help. Some people who experience palpitations often feel that these are stimulated by caffeine or alcohol. In these cases it would be wise to reduce intake.

#### **Do caffeinated drinks affect my blood pressure?**

Drinking caffeinated drinks can cause an immediate increase in blood pressure in people who do not usually consume these drinks, but this effect is not observed in regular coffee drinkers. There is some evidence that people with high blood pressure, who drink coffee during stress, might experience a slight rise in blood pressure. However, the majority of studies suggest that drinking moderate amounts of caffeine (up to 400mg per day) regularly has little or no effect on blood pressure.

#### **Smoking and coffee**

The combination of cigarette smoking and drinking coffee together may raise blood pressure more than drinking coffee alone in people with high blood pressure.

#### **Does drinking coffee affect my cholesterol level?**

Decaffeinated, instant or filtered coffee is unlikely to have a significant influence on blood cholesterol. There is some evidence that drinking moderate amounts of unfiltered or boiled coffee may increase blood cholesterol levels.

# Healthy eating

## Caffeine and my health contd.

### Risk factors for your heart health

If you are concerned about your heart health, then cutting down on coffee is less likely to help you to protect your heart than other measures such as physical activity, a diet low in saturated fat and eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

### Other health matters

#### Children and teenagers

The Foods Standards Agency recommend that teenagers should limit caffeine consumption to no more than 100mg of caffeine daily – so that's about 2 cans of cola, less if they're also eating chocolate.

Children should get even less. If you have children or teenagers, how much caffeine are they consuming?

#### Pregnancy

The Food Standards Agency recommends that if you're pregnant it's important not to have too much caffeine. This is because high levels of caffeine can result in babies having a low birth weight, which can increase the risk of health problems in later life. High levels of caffeine might also cause miscarriage.

The Food Standards Agency recommends not to have more than 200mg of caffeine a day when you're pregnant.

The amount of caffeine in food and drink will vary, but as a guide each of these contains roughly 200mg or less of caffeine:

- 2 mugs of instant coffee (100mg each)
- 1 mug of filter coffee (140mg each)
- 2 mugs of tea (75mg each)
- 5 cans of cola (up to 40mg each)
- 2 cans of 'energy' drink (up to 80mg each)
- 4 (50g) bars of plain chocolate (up to 50 mg each) - caffeine in milk chocolate is about half that of plain chocolate

So if you eat a bar of plain chocolate and drink one mug of filter coffee in a day, or if you drink two mugs of tea and a can of cola, you'll have almost reached 200mg. But don't worry if you occasionally have more than this, because the risks are likely to be very small.

Remember that caffeine is also found in certain cold and flu remedies, so always check with your GP or another health professional before taking any of these if you're concerned about the amount of caffeine you're consuming.

