

Coffee speeds up return of bowel function after colon surgery

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Patients who drank coffee, rather than water, after bowel surgery to remove a part of their colon experienced a quicker return to bowel movements and tolerance of solid food.

Those are two of the key findings of a comparative study of 80 patients, carried out at University Hospital Heidelberg, Germany, and published in the surgical journal *BJS*.

"Post-operative [bowel obstruction](#) is a common problem after [abdominal surgery](#) and the aim of this study was to test our theory that coffee would help to alleviate this" says lead author Dr Sascha Müller, who is now based at Kantonsspital St Gallen, Switzerland.

The 80 patients were randomised into coffee and water groups before their operation, with one patient in the water arm subsequently excluded due to a change in their surgical procedure.

Patient characteristics were similar in both groups. Their average age was 61 years and 56 per cent were male.

Just over half (56 per cent) had colonic cancer, 28 per cent had diverticular disease (a structural problem with the wall of their colon), 13 per cent had [inflammatory bowel disease](#) and four per cent had other conditions. The majority had [open surgery](#) (61 per cent) and the remainder had laparoscopic surgery.

The patients were given 100mls of coffee or water three times a day.

Key findings were:

- Time to first bowel movement after surgery was just over 60 hours in the coffee group and 74 hours in the water group.
- The coffee group were able to tolerate solid food in just over 49 hours, compared to just under 56 hours in the water group.
- The [coffee drinkers](#) were also able to pass wind just under 41 hours after surgery, compared with over 46 hours for the water group.
- Length of hospital stay and ill health were similar in both groups.

"This [randomised trial](#) showed that the time to first bowel movement after surgery was much shorter in the coffee drinkers than the water drinkers" says Dr Müller.

"Although 10 per cent of the patients did not want to drink strong coffee at this time, it was well accepted by the group and no coffee-related complications were noted.

"It is not clear how coffee stimulates the intestine and caffeine appears to have been ruled out by previous studies, which found that decaffeinated coffee, which was not used in this study, also has beneficial effects.

"Whatever the mechanism, it is clear that postoperative coffee consumption is a cheap and safe way to activate bowel motility after elective colonic surgery."

More information: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bjs.8885/abstract

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