

In the loop: Mayo physician dispels popular coffee misconceptions

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Is coffee good or bad for us? How much is too much? Can it stunt growth? Donald Hensrud, M.D., director of Mayo Clinic's Healthy Living Program, provides answers to these much-debated questions.

The greatest of all holidays - International Coffee Day - was celebrated

by all (we assume) on Sept. 29. If you're like us, though, you don't need a designated day to celebrate the joys of [coffee](#) because every day is Coffee Day. But should it be? Or is our favorite beverage doing nothing more than stunting our growth, dehydrating us, and putting us at an increased risk for other health problems?

To answer those questions, the Rochester Post-Bulletin recently asked the director of Mayo Clinic's Healthy Living Program, and resident coffee guru, Donald Hensrud, M.D., to dispel some of the most popular myths surrounding the [coffee bean](#).

Here are some highlights:

Could coffee actually be good for us? Dr. Hensrud tells reporter Anne Halliwell it's important to differentiate between coffee and the caffeine that it contains. "One of the things people don't realize is that there are a lot of antioxidants in coffee. There's fairly good data that coffee is protective against Type 2 diabetes. That effect is seen both in caffeinated and decaf coffee," he says. And Dr. Hensrud points to a recent article in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* "that showed that caffeine, separate from coffee, was related to lower overall mortality in a population study."

Is it possible to drink too much coffee? Dr. Hensrud tells Halliwell that while "yes, it is" possible to have too much of a good (or great) thing, much of that revolves around potential side effects. "And these are well-known: problems sleeping, heartburn, urinary symptoms, especially in people who are predisposed," he says. "So if people are having side effects from it, they should cut back."

Does coffee dehydrate us? Dr. Hensrud says not as much as we might think, but that it depends on how much coffee we're drinking throughout each day. "The body's pretty smart, and if it's dehydrated, if it needs

fluid, it'll hang onto it, even if it comes from coffee or alcohol," the good doctor tells Halliwell. "Now, at large amounts, it might promote some dehydration."

Can coffee really stunt our growth? Asked whether drinking coffee will stunt our (or our children's) growth, Dr. Hensrud tells Halliwell that he's "aware of no evidence of that, although I remember hearing that quite a bit when I was younger." (Us, too. Thanks, mom and dad.)

What's the right amount of coffee? Finally, there's the question of an "ideal" amount of coffee we can drink every day. Dr. Hensrud says that, again, depends on how our daily grind (see what we did there?) is affecting us physically. With one important disclaimer. "If somebody's not having side effects, the data on diabetes show that there's a benefit - a dose-response relationship - up to six cups a day," he says, while adding that, "The one caveat there is if someone's trying to get pregnant, at high amounts, it does interfere with conception, and there's an increased risk of miscarriage."

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