Study finds new benefit of coffee: It reduces pain
7 September 2012, by Karen Kaplan

Scientists in Norway have more good news for coffee drinkers. Researchers have already found evidence that the drink - or the beans it's brewed from - can help with weight loss, reduce one's risk of developing Alzheimer's disease or dementia, boost muscle growth, protect against certain types of cancers and can even reduce one's risk of premature death, among many other benefits.

Now comes word that a cuppa joe reduces physical pain.

The surprising finding is based on a study involving 48 volunteers who agreed to spend 90 minutes performing fake computer tasks meant to mimic office work. The tasks were known to cause pain in the shoulders, neck, forearms and wrists, and the researchers wanted to compare how people with chronic pain and those who were pain-free tolerated the tasks.

As a matter of convenience, the scientists allowed people to drink coffee before taking the test "to avoid unpleasant effects of caffeine deprivation, e.g. decreased vigor and alertness, sleepiness, and fatigue," they reported.

But when it came time to analyze the data, the researchers from Norway's National Institute of Occupational Health and Oslo University Hospital noticed that the 19 people who drank coffee reported a lower intensity of pain than the 29 people who didn't.

In the shoulders and neck, for instance, the average pain intensity was rated 41 (on a 100-point scale) among the coffee drinkers and 55 for the coffee abstainers. Similar gaps were found for all pain sites measured, and coffee's apparent pain-mitigation effect held up regardless of whether the subjects had chronic pain or not.

The authors of the study, which was published this week in the journal BMC Research Notes, cautioned that since the study wasn't designed to test coffee's influence on pain, the results come with many uncertainties. For starters, the researchers don't know how much coffee the coffee drinkers consumed before taking the computer tests. They also doubt that the coffee drinkers and abstainers were similar in all respects except for their java consumption. Problems like these tend to undermine the importance of the findings. But those reservations are unlikely to trouble the legions of coffee drinkers looking for any reason not to cut back on their daily caffeine habit.

(c)2012 Los Angeles Times
Distributed by MCT Information Services

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.