Coffee May Protect Against Disease

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It's surprising when something that was once considered questionable for your health turns out to have health benefits, usually with the proviso to use it "in moderation." That happened with chocolate and alcohol, and now it is coffee's turn, reports the February issue of the Harvard Health Letter.

Here's some of the mostly good news about coffee:

Blood pressure. Results from long-term studies are showing that coffee may not increase the risk for high blood pressure over time, as previously thought. Study findings for other cardiovascular effects are a mixed bag.

Cancer. Coffee might have anti-cancer properties. Last year, researchers found that coffee drinkers were 50% less likely to get liver

cancer than nondrinkers. A few studies have found ties to lower rates of colon, breast, and rectal cancers.

Cholesterol. Two substances in coffee -- kahweol and cafestol -- raise cholesterol levels. Paper filters capture these substances, but that doesn't help the many people who now drink non-filtered coffee drinks, such as lattes. Researchers have also found a link between cholesterol increases and decaffeinated coffee, possibly because of the type of bean used to make certain decaffeinated coffees.

Diabetes. Heavy coffee drinkers may be half as likely to get diabetes as light drinkers or nondrinkers. Coffee may contain chemicals that lower blood sugar. A coffee habit may also increase your resting metabolism rate, which could help keep diabetes at bay.

Parkinson's disease. Coffee seems to protect men, but not women, against Parkinson's disease. One possible explanation for the sex difference may be that estrogen and caffeine need the same enzymes to be metabolized, and estrogen captures those enzymes.

Source: Harvard Health Letter