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Health & Wellness

The Coffee Craze: Good or Bad?

By Julia Chiappetta



I have met some very talented young men and women who are focused on nutrition and sports performance who I invited to write with me on topics of interest.

One is Alyssa Procaccini, who just graduated with a Bachelor of Nutritional Science from the University of Connecticut's School of Agricultural Science. I posed a question and challenged to her to write about a hot topic related to nutrition, something being discussed among her peers. She came back with this informational piece on coffee, which I share with you here, as we continue to debate the pros and cons of all the coffee-flavored bars, energy drinks and shakes available to our youth today:

"It seems no matter where you turn, caffeinated beverages and

food products are available in abundance. Whether it be coffee, tea, or even a baked treat, many products can contain caffeine, traces of caffeine, or a coffee/tea flavor. Is grabbing a caffeinated water or supplement on your way to work really worth it? Does it impact your health in any way that might be different from your morning cup of Joe?

"In short: it's not going to make a difference either way it's consumed—the human body will process caffeine the same way across all beverages. This does not mean skipping coffee or tea in favor of other caffeine products is the best option! Coffee and tea both contain natural compounds that are beneficial to the human body, and these compounds are not in caffeinated waters, supplements, or baked goods. Flavinoids and antioxidants (like gamma-tocopherols and caffeic acid) can help protect the body's cells from oxygen-related stress, which occurs from our daily wear-and-tear as well as the natural aging process. Combined with a diet high in fruits and vegetables, studies show that consuming antioxidants (from coffee or other foods, like kidney beans and blackberries) reduces the risk of Alzheimer's disease and stroke substantially. Coffee and tea-"flavored" products sometimes contain these beneficial substances, if there's actual coffee and tea

leaves listed in the ingredients. If the product is labeled as "artificially flavored," then it's not going to include the healthy aspects of the antioxidants.

"These beneficial substances are absent in products like caffeinated energy drinks—usually extremely high in added sugars, and caffeine-infused baked goods like chocolate bars (excluding dark chocolate, which does contain its own natural antioxidant called cacao, and a very small amount of caffeine) that expose the compounds to heat and destroy them.

"Energy supplements would also not contain any beneficial substances. To get the most out of your cup of coffee or tea, it's best to drink the cup black or with a splash of healthy organic coconut or almond milk. It's very important to skip sugary high-calorie creamers or sweeteners; doing so helps reduce morning lag that you may feel as the day goes on.

"In addition to a cup of coffee or tea, a great energy pick-up in the morning is a bit of light exercise! Doing some mild stretches in your kitchen or taking a walk around the block can invigorate your body and help you prepare for the day ahead, while uplifting your mood and making you feel better overall. That's something that the energy boost in a cup of coffee alone can't do!"

A bit about my very talented

guest writer: Alyssa intends to continue her education to obtain a master's degree in human nutrition and dietetics. At present she's working as an AmeriCorps Summer Meal VISTA associate, helping provide free meals and nutrition education opportunities to children for the duration of the summer. She would like me to thank The Greenwich Sentinel for the opportunity to write this article and is inspired by their work in the community and through its Health & Wellness column. It inspires me, too, to know that I have many young readers focused on living healthy lifestyles.

As always... be good to your body, mind and soul! Enjoy these long, warm days of summer by visiting the farmer's market, drinking something green, increasing your time outdoors with walks, hikes, runs, swims, bikes, and sitting to enjoy the beauty in each sunrise and sunset from one of your favorite vantage spots.

Love and encouragement go a long way and so my wish for you it that you will both receive and give these gifts freely.

Julia Chiappetta is the author of "Breast Cancer: The Notebook" (Gemini Media, 2006) and is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting. She lives in Cos Cob. More information and past columns can be found at JuliaChiappetta.com.

