

Can Coffee Prevent MS?

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You may have heard that drinking [coffee](#) can prevent [multiple sclerosis](#).

That's not exactly true. You can't count on your morning latte to prevent MS. Drinking a lot of coffee may improve your odds, though.

One study looked at more than 2,300 people enrolled in a [health plan](#) in northern California. It found that people who drank the most coffee had much lower odds of getting MS. A Swedish study came up with similar results.

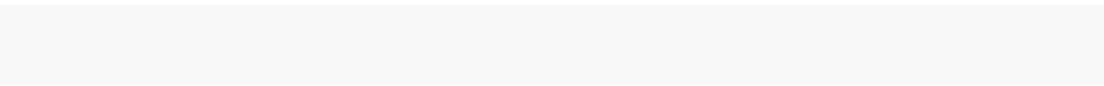
Don't fill up that giant mug just yet, though.

“It’s exciting and it’s promising, but it’s not really enough for me to recommend drinking large amounts of coffee,”

Neither project proved that drinking coffee causes lower rates of MS. They only said it might lower your chances of having it.

Elaine Kingwell, PhD, an epidemiologist at the University of British Columbia, said the similar findings of the two studies do give them weight. But she cautioned not to put too much stock in research that asks people to recall such behavior as how much coffee they had years in the past.

“It’s an interesting finding, but not a super strong one,” she says.



How Could It Help?

MS  causes your body's [immune system](#) to attack the protective layers around nerves in your [brain](#) and [spine](#) -- the [central nervous system](#).

[Caffeine](#) stimulates your central nervous system. It can also ease [inflammation](#) of tissue there and help you keep those protective layers.

Incidentally, caffeine is associated with lower odds of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.

How Much Would You Need to Drink?

Those California researchers asked folks how many cups of caffeinated [coffee](#)  they had each day. The study found a significant drop in the chances of having MS with those who said they drank 4 or more cups.

In the Swedish study, people who drank 3-6 cups had a lower chance of getting MS than non-coffee drinkers, while the Swedes who downed 7 or more cups of coffee lowered their odds the most.

Put another way: In the Swedish study, people who didn't drink coffee were 1½ times more likely to get [MS](#)  than those who drank 6 or more cups a day.

In the California study, non-coffee drinkers were 1½ times more likely to get MS than those who had 4 or more cups a day.

The Fine Print

“It clearly opens the road to start new studies in this,” Elias Sotirchos, MD, clinical and research fellow in neuroimmunology at Johns Hopkins University, says of the studies.

Still, Sotirchos noted that coffee has more than 1,000 biologically active compounds. So it’s possible that one of these, not the [caffeine](#) , produced the results in the Swedish and California studies. Consumption of soda and [tea](#) in the two studies did not change the odds for MS, he said.

Researchers need more study to figure out whether [caffeine](#)  helps lower rates of MS in people who downed a lot of coffee. If it does, researchers still need to learn how it helps.

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