Coffee and tea: perks for health and longevity?

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PURPOSE OF REVIEW: Tea and coffee, after water, are the most commonly consumed beverages in the world and are the top sources of caffeine and antioxidant polyphenols in the American diet. The purpose of this review is to assess the health effects of chronic tea and/or coffee consumption.

RECENT FINDINGS: Tea consumption, especially green tea, is associated with significantly reduced risks for stroke, diabetes and depression, and improved levels of glucose, cholesterol, abdominal obesity and blood pressure.

Habitual coffee consumption in large epidemiological studies is associated with reduced mortality, both for all-cause and cardiovascular deaths. In addition, coffee intake is associated with risks of heart failure, stroke, diabetes mellitus and some cancers in an inverse dose-dependent fashion (i.e.: increased intake reduces risk). Surprisingly, coffee is associated with neutral to reduced risks for both atrial and ventricular arrhythmias (i.e.: fast irregular heart rhythms). However, caffeine at high doses can increase anxiety, insomnia, calcium loss and possibly the risk of fractures.

SUMMARY: Coffee and tea can generally be recommended as health-promoting additions to a healthy adult diet (i.e.: coffee should NOT be a substitute for meals). Adequate dietary calcium intake may be particularly important for tea and coffee drinkers.