Does Caffeine Increase Your Risk of Colo-rectal Cancer?

Colon and rectal cancer is the third most common cancer for both men and women in the US. This year, nearly 150,000 people will be diagnosed with colo-rectal cancer and over 50,000 people will die from the disease. Some strides have been made in prevention, and fewer cases are being diagnosed each year.In the past few years, colorectal cancer screening has been responsible for reducing the number of incidences and deaths from this disease. Colo-rectal screening allows doctors to find small polyps in the colon and rectum and remove them. Left in the colon, these polyps often turn into cancer. Colo-rectal screening also helps doctors find cancer in earlier stages, when treatments are more likely to be successful. In addition, colo-rectal cancer treatments have improved, reducing the mortality rate from this form of cancer.But, as with any serious illness, we are also consistently looking for ways to prevent colo-rectal cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, the most important steps you can take to prevent colo-rectal cancer are:Get tested – In most cases, it is recommended that you get your first colo-rectal screening at age 50. However, if you have a family history of the disease, it may be recommended that you begin at an earlier age.Eat right and exercise – The American Cancer society recommends eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, and limiting your intake of high fat foods. Some studies also suggest that folic acid and calcium supplements can lower your risk. In addition to eating properly, it's also important to get regular exercise. Thirty minutes of exercise a day 5 days a week can help lower your risk of many diseases, including colo-rectal cancer. Being overweight is a risk factor for colo-rectal cancer, so be sure that you maintain a normal weight.Stop smoking – Smokers have a 30-40% greater likelihood of developing colo-rectal cancer than non-smokers. Most people know that smoking increases their risk of lung cancer, but many are unaware at how significantly smoking increases your colo-rectal cancer risks.Are other lifestyle habits increasing my risk?There have been questions about other habits and whether or not they can increase your risk of colo-rectal cancer. One of the most commonly questioned habits is drinking caffeine.One study, reported by the UK Tea Council, attempted to answer this question. The study observed men and women beginning in the early 1980s, and continuing on until 1998. The study observed dietary habits, other factors, among them caffeine consumption through drinking coffee or tea. Throughout the course of the study, just over 1400 cases of colo-rectal cancer were observed.The study noted no increase in the incidence of colo-rectal cancer in those people who drank tea or coffee over those who did not consume these caffeinated beverages. So, researchers concluded that drinking tea and coffee with caffeine is perfectly safe and does not increase your colo-rectal cancer risk.However, one additional finding in the study is particularly interesting. While the study did not find that drinking caffeinated beverages increased your colo-rectal cancer risk, it did find that drinking decaffeinated coffee seemed to actually lower your risk of rectal cancer over those people who never drank decaffeinated coffee.This finding is surprising, as little research has been performed on any health benefits associated with decaffeinated beverages. Why the decaffeinated coffee offered protection is unclear, as is whether this protection extends to other decaffeinated beverages, such as tea.As with most research conclusions, more studies and conclusions are needed before we fully understand the ramifications of drinking coffee and tea, whether caffeinated or not. As years go on, we'll have better direction on how to use such beverages to protect our health and reduce our risks. In the meantime, it appears that drinking your favorite caffeinated beverages is safe.This is good news for coffee and tea drinkers, whose beverage consumption mostly consists of these two drinks.And, there's reason to believe that there might be health benefits associated with these beverages. Both coffee and tea are good sources of anti-oxidants. Anti-oxidants are important because they neutralize the free radicals created by our bodies during the digestion process. Left unchecked, these free radicals cause disease and aging. But, with the proper dose of daily anti-oxidants, we can prevent the damage that free radicals can do.If you're interested in increasing your anti-oxidant intake, start by ensuring that your diet is loaded with fruits and vegetables. Some of the best fruit and vegetable sources are blueberries, artichokes, asparagus, tomatoes, strawberries and pomegranates.But, the easiest way to get your daily anti-oxidants might just be to drink one of the world's most popular beverages. That's right, tea; particularly green tea, offers some of the best anti-oxidant protection you'll ever find. Green tea's most important anti-oxidant is EGCG, which has been linked with preventing, and even treating many forms of disease.Green tea has been linked to preventing cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and Parkinson's disease. It is also thought to naturally regulate blood sugar and help in weight management. It's likely the world's most perfect beverage – low in caffeine and rich in protection.Preventing cancer is something all of us are concerned with. Even if you have a higher than average risk of developing colo-rectal cancer, it seems you're safe drinking your coffee and tea. However, your best bet for beverages just might be decaffeinated coffee and green tea to prevent this and other forms of disease.

About the Author

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