



# BALANCED CHOICES<sup>®</sup>

## monthly nutrigram

### A Healthy Jolt of Java

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Move over green tea, and make room for coffee as the next healthy hot beverage. Not only does coffee not deserve its bad press, it actually has some impressive health benefits. Over the past several years, researchers have shown that coffee does not increase the risk of heart disease, hypertension or ulcers. Still other researchers have shown that coffee may help reduce the risk of diabetes and Parkinson's disease. Add to that the potential reductions in headaches and a boost to endurance exercise, and coffee takes on the aura of a genuine health drink!

Coffee contains a lot of caffeine, and much of the new research shows that it's the caffeine that may be providing some of the health benefits. However, coffee also contains high amounts of phytochemicals and antioxidants – those health-boosting components found in fruits and vegetables – and these could also be responsible for coffee's new healthy image.

**Diabetes:** Several studies have shown a relationship between drinking coffee and a lower risk of type II diabetes. Researchers think this risk reduction may be related to substances in coffee known as quinides that make the body's cells more responsive to insulin – the hormone that helps keep blood sugar low. But much more research is needed to find out exactly how coffee may affect diabetes.

**Parkinson's & Alzheimer's Disease:** Researchers think the caffeine in coffee and other caffeinated beverages may help lower the risk of Parkinson's Disease, a progressive neurological disease that causes sufferers to have tremors, slow movement, and loss of balance. The evidence supporting caffeine's role in reducing risk is so strong, that researchers are currently developing Parkinson's medications that contain caffeine! The regular consumption of coffee may also have a protective effect against Alzheimer's disease. Again, researchers think this protective link is due to the caffeine.

**Performance Booster:** Caffeine may also help boost performance in endurance activities – especially in well-trained athletes. Caffeine may help athletes ignore fatigue and help muscles work harder for longer. Since coffee is a more concentrated source of caffeine than soda, a cup or two can possibly improve performance.

While some of the evidence, particularly in the diabetes studies, seems to show that the more coffee the better, excessive coffee and caffeine intake is not risk free. Not only can the caffeine in coffee keep you up at night and the jitters, it can also increase calcium losses through the urine and may reduce a woman's chance of getting pregnant. But it does appear that the benefits of drinking coffee outweigh the risk – which is good news for coffee lovers.

For more information on coffee, visit the Vanderbilt Institute for Coffee Studies at [www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/coffee](http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/coffee) and the Coffee Science source at [www.coffeescience.org](http://www.coffeescience.org).