Is it Safe to Have Caffeine With AFib?

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AFib and Caffeine – Should I Avoid Coffee?

Is caffeine bad for you if you have AFib?

If you are living with AFib, you may be wondering about the impact of caffeine on your condition, and its effect on your heart rate and rhythm. You may also have questions about whether you can consume caffeine-containing foods and beverages or if you should cut them out of your diet.

AFib and Caffeine – The Research

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is the most widespread cardiac arrhythmia, affecting 25% of people during their lifetime.

AFib happens when the two upper chambers of the heart, called the atria, lose their ability to send electrical impulses to both lower chambers, called the ventricles. The disruption in this essential conduction process causes an erratic heart rate, often accompanied by chest discomfort, shortness of breath and fatigue.

The standard of care for many years has been to counsel people with AFib to stop caffeine consumption immediately.

However, more than 20 clinical studies about the effects of caffeine on AFib since 2000 lack conclusive evidence demonstrating that caffeine has a detrimental effect on AFib.

The Research About Caffeine Intake and AFib

- A 2005 clinical study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition produced data that indicated caffeine is hazardous to people with very high intake levels, and that most individuals with AFib could consume average quantities of caffeine without experiencing adverse signs or symptoms.
- A 2014 meta-analysis of six studies by a research team from China showed that there is no increased risk of AF episodes for people who consume caffeine on a regular basis, and that routine use may decrease the possibility of occurrence.
- The Framingham Heart Study discovered no effect of caffeine consumption on AFib but also suggested needing further research to conclusively determine the effects of ingestion on healthy people with AFib and those with AFib tendencies.
- Clinical Cardiology Journal published a report stating that several other studies from large clinical trials produced results indicating no link between regular caffeine consumption and an increased risk of AFib. The report also says that many of those investigations had limitations.
- A large Scandinavian study showed no correlation between caffeine intake and AFib.
- A recent study in BMC Medicine confirmed that individuals consuming two cups of caffeinated beverages per day showed no connection with the risk of AFib incidents.
- The Heart Journal reports that there is no relationship between caffeine use and an increased risk of

> “patients with AFib are often told to avoid stimulants like caffeine, but the evidence for deleterious effects of caffeine is quite weak.” Dr. Stanley Nattel of the University of Montréal, QB stated this.

An Overview About Caffeine

Caffeine is a substance found in over 60 plants such as coffee beans, kola nuts, cacao pods, guarana and tea leaves.

It falls into the stimulant category because it increases heart rate and blood pressure. It also functions as a diuretic due to its tendency to rid the body of excess water.

Caffeine is present in the following foods and beverages:

- Chocolate.
- Coffee.
- Some kinds of tea.
- Soft drinks (sodas).
- Energy drinks.

Caffeine is also used as in several nutritional supplements because of its metabolism-boosting properties, and is often an ingredient in over-the-counter cold and pain medications.

According to MedlinePlus, the side effects of caffeine are:

- Anxiety.
- Dependency — needing to ingest more to receive the same effect.
- Dehydration.
- Dizziness.
- Headaches.
- Insomnia.
- Rapid or abnormal heart rhythm.
- Restlessness and shakiness.

Caffeine and Heart Rate Control

Heart rate control is a primary goal for managing AFib, as keeping a pulse between 80 and 110 at rest will reduce the heart muscle’s workload. AFib medications, such as beta-blockers and calcium channel blockers, will regulate heart rate, and in some cases a pacemaker is necessary.

Caffeine can speed up heart rate due to its stimulant properties, and as a result, people with AF are often advised to avoid caffeine or keep intake low because it will trigger an episode.

- WebMD’s information about AF states that stimulants like caffeine can prompt an occurrence, but that it is more likely to happen in people who do not usually consume it.
- Mayo Clinic indicates that caffeine may cause AF, and recommends limiting intake or abstaining.

Guidelines for AFib and Caffeine Intake

If you are someone who enjoys foods and beverages containing caffeine on a regular basis, continuing consumption will not likely trigger an episode of AFib if you monitor your intake and make wise choices (If your use of caffeinated products has not caused problems in the past).

- Cut out or abstain from caffeine if you have a history of sensitivity to it.
- Keep your consumption to a moderate and consistent amount, as increasing your intake could lead to an AFib episode.

- Make sure to always read labels on any over-the-counter cold medications or pain relievers if you have a history of adverse reactions to.

Considerations

- **Like alcohol, coffee stimulates the heart, increasing heart rate and blood pressure.** If you feel symptoms (i.e., palpitations) when you consume coffee, it would be better to avoid it. Otherwise, you can enjoy a cup or two of coffee every day. If you drink copious amounts of coffee, you should consider cutting down by mixing 50/50 regular with decaf coffee.
- **Avoid sugar and cream, which are often added to coffee.** Too much sugar in your diet increases the risk of obesity and diabetes (and the related heart complications) while the cream promotes weight gain and cholesterol build up in the arteries. Artificial sweeteners and creamers are not healthy either. Try to use low-fat milk or almond milk, and sprinkle your coffee with ground cinnamon.
- **Keep an eye on all foods and beverages that contain caffeine.** Green, black and white teas are all a source of caffeine, and so is cocoa, chocolate and cola. Many energy drinks contain caffeine, sometimes hidden under different names, like guarana – the active ingredient is essentially caffeine.
- **Avoid drinking your coffee either too hot or with ice.** Drinking hot or cold beverages lead to vagal stimulation which is a trigger of AFib – while it has nothing to do with the caffeine content, it still can be a trigger.
- **Don’t drink coffee in the evening or before bedtime, to get a restful sleep** – otherwise, you may experience fatigue the next day, which can trigger AFib.

In Conclusion

Caffeine affects vary from person to person due to individual differences in genetics and consumption level.

It is always wise to discuss with your physician about AFib and caffeine consumption to get his or her recommendations. Your doctor knows and understands your unique situation and is your best resource for appropriate guidance.