

Coffee and colorectal cancer

Richard Béliveau

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According to the results of a Dutch clinical study, regular coffee consumption reduces the risk of recurrence and mortality by a third in patients in remission from colorectal cancer.

Colorectal cancer represents the second cause of cancer mortality in Canada, having caused nearly 10,000 deaths in 2021, twice as much as the mortality due to breast and prostate cancers (approximately 5,000 deaths each annually).

One of the factors that contributes to the lethality of colorectal cancer is the relatively high rate (20-30%) of patients who experience a recurrence of this cancer in the years following the end of treatment.

These recurrences are a bad omen, because they are often more resistant to treatment and therefore reduce the probability of patient survival. Finding ways to reduce the occurrence of these recurrences is therefore extremely important to improve the life expectancy of people affected by the disease.

SURVIVING CANCER

As with all cancers, reducing the risk of recurrence of colorectal cancer begins by adopting certain lifestyle habits that slow the progression of cancer cells.

One of the most important factors is maintaining a normal body weight, with a body mass index between 19 and 25 kg/m²: Being overweight is often associated with chronic inflammation and insulin resistance, both important cancer risk factors.

These two risk factors are also strongly influenced by regular physical exercise, and it is therefore important to do physical activity regularly, while avoiding long periods of completely sedentary time (sitting or lying down).

Finally, since the colon is directly in contact with what we eat, it goes without saying that the quality of the diet can greatly influence the risk of cancer or recurrence. In this sense, it is clearly established that a reduction in the intake of red meats (in particular cold meats), combined with an increase in that of plants represents a winning combination which minimizes exposure to carcinogens while creating optimal conditions so that anticancer defenses can slow down tumor progression.

COFFEE AS REINFORCEMENT

If the broad outlines of an anti-cancer diet are known, it is always interesting to identify additional components that can add additional protection and further reduce the risk of cancer. According to a recent study, regular coffee consumption could represent one of these interesting additions (1).

In this study conducted in the Netherlands among 1719 patients with colorectal cancer, researchers observed that those who drank 4 cups of coffee or more per day had a 32% reduced risk of recurrence and mortality compared to those who drank less than 2 cups per day.



These results are in agreement with previous studies which showed that coffee consumption was associated with a reduction in the risk of colorectal cancer (2), as well as other studies which noted a reduction in the risk of certain cancers among regular coffee drinkers, particularly that of the liver.

Coffee is a complex beverage, containing several hundred bioactive phytochemical molecules, and it is increasingly clear that its anticancer effects are a consequence of the anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and antiproliferative properties of these molecules.

It also appears that the gut microbiome processes these coffee components to produce additional bioactive metabolites with anticancer properties.

Overall, there is therefore no doubt that coffee represents an interesting addition to an anti-cancer diet, in particular to its ability to reduce the probability of recurrence in survivors of colorectal cancer.

- (1) Oyelere AM et al. Coffee consumption is associated with a reduced risk of colorectal cancer recurrence and all-cause mortality. *Int. J. Cancer* 2024 ; 154 : 2054-2063.
- (2) Grosso G et al. Coffee, caffeine, and health outcomes: an umbrella review. *Annu. Rev. Nutr.* 2017 ; 37 : 131-156.