

The Magic Bean

Whether you love or loathe it, coffee's appeal extends beyond taste alone and can now be found in medicine and skincare

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originate in various parts of the world and therefore give distinguished flavours. The less flavourful and more bitter species of coffee called robusta is a more productive, disease resistant, and caffeinated bean (>40 per cent) than arabica which is distinguished by its full body taste in combination with rich flavour aromatics and winey acidity and accounts for three quarters of the world's coffee. People have their taste preferences: but as a rule, most specialty coffee is arabica and good quality robusta is used in traditional Italian espresso to provide a

THIS PAGE: Fruit of the coffee plant. OPPOSITE PAGE: Seeds of the berries are roasted and brewed

It is cultivated in more than 70 countries and brewed all over the world by the billions who drink it every day – yet how much do you really know about one of the world's most popular drinks?

Undomesticated coffee is believed to have originated from Ethiopia where legend has it that a shepherd discovered the euphoric effect of the beans when he observed his goats dancing gleefully around a green leafy shrub laden with bright red berries. The seeds of the berries from the *Coffea* plant are roasted and brewed to make the delectable dark drink that is served according to cultural preference, and known by many names including joe, jitter juice and cuppa. However, it is coffee's earlier names that give us a clue about the cultivation and origins of the coffee trade as far back as the 15th century. Mocha was the name used by coffee traders who purchased and shipped coffee from a port on the Red Sea in Yemen called Al-Mukha. During the 17th century, Arabica coffee seeds from Yemen were taken to Java in Indonesia by the Dutch to establish the second oldest

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single-origin commercial coffee plantations and satisfy Europe's thirst for the beverage.

From a cluster of fragrant white flowers, come oval berries that ripen from green, to yellow, to red and to black over six to 11 months depending on the species. Within each berry live two green seeds that will be roasted to become the brown fragrant coffee bean we know and love. There are two species of coffee that lend to dozens of single-origin coffee brand names (eg Blue Mountain, Kona, Yirgacheffe) that

full-bodied taste and crema.

Coffee has universal appeal and curiously symbolises both 'dolce far niente' and industriousness; but what is for sure is that the industry has exploded with coffee chains popping up on every street corner and slick, easy-to-use home appliances ensuring a smooth café latte is never far away thanks to companies like Nespresso. If you think that Starbucks is the lifeblood of Americans, or that there isn't an Italian who can start the day without an espresso – you'd be wrong according to Euromonitor (2014).

With neither America nor Italy making the Top 10, Finland tops the list as the world's biggest coffee drinkers (per capita).

Despite its popularity, you may be wondering if coffee is actually good for you or it's better to stick to green tea? Earlier research suggested that coffee increased the risk of cancer and heart disease, however these studies didn't account for the high levels of smoking and physical inactivity amongst heavy coffee drinkers. Coffee has antioxidants and a few vitamins, but its kick comes from caffeine – a bitter white

crystalline alkaloid that if discovered today would likely be a prescription drug due to its potency and addictive nature.

In recent years, studies have revealed that moderate coffee consumption is benign or mildly beneficial to healthy adult's brain health and may reduce the risk of several chronic diseases like depression, skin and endometrial cancer, heart disease, Type 2 Diabetes, dementia, colon and liver cancer, liver cirrhosis, gallstones, Parkinson's Disease and erectile dysfunction. This research doesn't account for the fact that





LUCA TETTONI/ROBERT HARDING/CORBIS; COFFEE SCRUB



THIS PAGE: The mighty bean treats a range skin conditions. OPPOSITE PAGE: Coffee is an astringent, exfoliator and natural deodoriser

high consumption of unfiltered coffee (boiled or espresso) has been associated with mild elevations in cholesterol levels; and people with a specific (and fairly common) genetic mutation that slows the body's breakdown of caffeine show increased risk of heart disease with two or more cups of coffee a day.

Coffee is even credited with making you a bit happier by stimulating the production of the neurotransmitters associated with elevated mood including serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. Coffee increases energy levels by acting as a stimulant and increasing adrenaline hormone levels (fight or flight reactions), so individuals prone to anxiety are best to avoid it.

Whether you abhor or adore the taste, ground coffee beans have a pH similar to our skin (4.5pH) and are considered an effective astringent, a good exfoliator, a free radical scavenger, natural deodoriser, and acne, rosacea and eczema neutraliser when applied to the skin. If experimenting at home, it is important that the coffee is ground to an espresso consistency to avoid scratching and irritating the skin. For delicate skin care needs, revert to specialised skin care products that harness the antioxidant power of coffee like 100% Pure's Organic Coffee Bean Caffeine Eye

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Cream which assists with reducing puffiness and brightening dark circles due to caffeine's ability to reduce swelling and inflammation. Caffeine has been credited with repairing UV damage when applied to the skin and 100% Pures Coffee Cherry Sun Damage Corrective Cream hydrates and combats sun damage. Despite the topical benefits, drinking more than four cups of coffee a day for a prolonged period appears to negatively affect the skin by contributing to dehydration and skin dryness, liver spots, acne aggravation and stained teeth.

Caffeine was once thought to have powerful effects on the fatty tissue that

contributes to cellulite, but the results only last up to three hours. Other studies have shown that caffeine can boost metabolic rate to assist with burning fat by up to 10 per cent; however, this effect appears to be from drinking black coffee (not milk and sugary coffee drinks which can add as much as 500 extra calories) and is diminished in long-term coffee drinkers. Studies have also shown that drinking five cups a day can increase the risk of metabolic syndrome, which leads to fat storage at the stomach and waist and high blood pressure as a result of increased polyphenols. Because it is the polyphenols in coffee and not the caffeine,



THIS PAGE: Fair Trade coffee ensures the money goes to farmers, their families and the community. OPPOSITE PAGE: Some studies indicate that caffeine helps to boost metabolic rate and burn fat

weight gain will occur whether drinking caffeinated or decaffeinated coffee.

Brazil is the largest green coffee producer, and green unroasted coffee beans are one of the most traded agricultural commodities in the world with more than 100 million people in developing countries now dependent on coffee as their primary source of income. Unfortunately, our thirst for coffee has not been without significant costs to the communities and the environment over the past 300 years with massive clearcutting of rainforest for coffee plantations, exorbitant water

requirements and large-scale displacement and exploitation of indigenous people.

According to Carrie Evans, owner of Excelso Coffee Roasters in New Zealand, Fair Trade certification is important because many coffee farmers still struggle to make a living, and Fair Trade ensures that more money goes to the farmers, their families, and communities to allow for better health and education. As a small roaster, Evans has witnessed how the increasingly popular system of 'direct trade' mutually benefits the farmers who receive fair wages for their crop. This helps them to improve their

farming methods, the quality of the coffee, and the roaster who is guaranteed a supply of quality coffee from that farm. Without economic pressure, farmers are more likely to cultivate coffee that is grown under the forest canopy, preserving the wildlife habitat and environment through decreased deforestation, water and pesticide use; increased biodiversity; and cultivation of healthier plants and bean. Just consider the 140 litres of water required to grow the seeds to produce a single cup of coffee in regions that are already water scarce, and you will understand how it is important to

vote with your dollars. Consumers drive the market; and many roasters and coffee chains are committed to offering conscious coffee choices with Fair Trade, Bird Friendly (shade grown) and Organic coffee. If you are unsure, ask your barista, do your research and look for certification seals on the package.

The good news is, you needn't feel guilty about the pleasure coffee gives you – the key is moderation. One to two cups a day appears to offer some benefits to brain and body functioning, given you mind the milk and sugar and stay hydrated. 