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In reply—Is Coffee Harmful? If Looking for Longevity, Say Yes to the Coffee, No to the Sugar

We thank DiNicolantonio et al for their interest in our article on coffee consumption and mortality.1 We agree that the association of coffee consumption with all-cause mortality or disease-specific mortality is complex, and we cannot claim that our results establish causality because of the observational design of our study and other factors, such as unmeasured or unknown potential confounding exposures.

However, we do not agree with the opinion of DiNicolantonio et al that all but the associations between the highest levels of coffee drinking and mortality became statistically insignificant in fully adjusted models. In fact, we reported that the association exists for all models in men and also in stratified analyses for younger men and women. In addition, we admitted in the Limitations section of our article as well as in the previous reply to the editor2 that some potential important confounders, including sleep disorders and insomnia, could not be included in our analysis. Therefore, future research is needed to obtain data on these issues and reevaluate this association.

Regarding the occupational and medical issues related to fatigue and alertness, it has been confirmed in many of our earlier publications that the Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support population is homogeneous and generally healthy, the majority is from white and from middle to high socioeconomic strata, and most are employed in professional or executive occupations.3 We believe that these factors reduce the likelihood of confounding by these issues raised by DiNicolantonio et al.

Finally, regarding the possible associations of coffee consumption as a marker of other less-healthy food consumption, we agree that this needs to be considered. It is possible that drinking coffee could be accompanied by other unhealthy dietary habits and these choices could partly explain the association of coffee consumption with higher mortality. The evidence that sugar intake is associated with chronic disease is still a hotly debated topic; therefore, it is certainly not clear that sugar is causing the health problems suggested by DiNicolantonio et al. The common belief that sugar is causing health problems is inconsistent with much scientific evidence, as illustrated in the recent excellent review of sugar intake and type 2 diabetes by Cozma and Sievenpiper.4 Nevertheless, many of the unhealthy dietary choices that could accompany coffee consumption suggested by DiNicolantonio et al would be expected to increase cardiovascular mortality; however, our large study with long follow-up did not suggest any increase in cardiovascular mortality across a large range of coffee consumption in any age or either sex.

Regardless, we appreciate the comments of DiNicolantonio et al and we agree that we need additional research to investigate the association of coffee consumption with mortality. Clearly, future research is warranted with regard to coffee consumption combined with other lifestyle choices, including dietary habits, as well as physical activity levels and cardiorespiratory fitness.

Junxiu Liu, MD
Xuemei Sui, MD, MPH, PhD
Steven N. Blair, PED
Arnold School of Public Health
University of South Carolina
Columbia

Carl J. Lavie, MD
John Ochsner Heart and Vascular Institute
Ochsner Clinical School
University of Queensland School of Medicine
New Orleans, LA


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