**Oh coffee, how good art thou?**

We are between sets of interns; therefore this girl must get up early to open our facility, which is not a favorite thing for me. I enjoy my mornings and I do enjoy getting up early, but 4:45 is just too early for me on a regular basis. One of my saving graces in the morning is coffee. Oh coffee! How good art thou?

Studies from numerous Universities have been compiled and the results are showing that coffee drinkers have lower risk of diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, and colon cancer. It also is a mood elevator, helps treat headaches, a performance enhancer and it could lower your risk of cavities. Yes, this is all true according to Vanderbilt University’s, Institute for Coffee Studies, which conducts its own research and tracks coffee studies from around the world.

In at least six studies research has shown that people who drink coffee on a regular basis are up to 30-60% less likely to develop Parkinson’s, with three studies showing that the more they drink, the lower the risk. Other research shows that compared to not drinking coffee, at least two cups daily can translate to a 25% reduced risk of colon cancer, and 80% drop in liver cirrhosis risk and nearly half the risk of gallstones.

Is it the coffee or the caffeine? Coffee beans are full of antioxidants, some which become especially potent during the roasting process. However, with Parkinson’s disease it seems to be directly related to the caffeine. In fact, many Parkinson’s drugs are now being developed with a derivative of caffeine. It is known that caffeine is also what helps in treating asthma and headaches. In fact, a single dose of pain reliever contains up to 120 milligrams of caffeine. A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 85 mgs.

Caffeine has always been known to enhance athletic endurance and performance. In fact, it used to be considered a “controlled” substance by the Olympic Games Committee. The caffeine seems to stimulate the brain and nervous system into doing things differently. It will signal the body to ignore fatigue or recruit extra units of muscle for intense athletic performance. Caffeine may even have a direct effect on encouraging the muscles to produce a stronger contraction. The amazing thing is that caffeine positively enhances strength, speed and endurance something that most other “performance-enhancing” drugs won’t do.

What about those antioxidants? They include a group of compounds called quinines, chlorogenic acid, tocopherols and minerals such as magnesium. All these components have been shown to improve insulin sensitivity and glucose metabolism. A Harvard study reported a reduced risk towards diabetes with individuals who drank regular coffee and those who drank decaf coffee (only ½ as much protection).

It also contains several important nutrients, including Riboflavin, Pantothenic Acid, Manganese, Potassium, Magnesium and Niacin.

Even with kids, there seems to be no evidence of caffeine being harmful. In fact; the opposite has shown that coffee has the capability of raising alertness and concentration. Coffee drinking kids may do better on school tests because they are more awake, not because their brains are any smarter. In a study from Brazil, they found that children who drink coffee are less likely to have depression than other children. In fact, no studies show that coffee in reasonable amounts is in any way harmful to children.

Coffee may help you live longer, given that coffee drinkers are less likely to get many diseases. There are several observational studies showing that coffee drinkers have a lower risk of death (20% in men and 26% in women). Diabetics who drink coffee showed in one study a 30% lower risk of death.

Coffee is the biggest source of antioxidants in the western world. Research shows that most people get more antioxidants from coffee than both fruits and vegetables.

What is an acceptable amount of coffee to drink for benefits? At least 2 cups a day. The research even indicated that the more coffee you drink, the greater the benefits. Just don’t let it interfere in your overall healthy lifestyle (i.e. expense, sleep patterns, diuretic concerns, and calories). So maybe now you don’t have to feel guilty about enjoying that coffee habit.