Kidney Stones a New Risk for Coffee Drinkers

Individuals who are prone to kidney stones or who ingest large amounts of coffee should limit their caffeine intake, according to study results.

Researchers gave a dose of caffeine equivalent to that found in two cups of coffee to participants who had a history of kidney stones. Following ingestion of the caffeine, the subjects showed more calcium in their urine; this puts them at a higher risk of forming kidney stones.

Study authors suggest people prone to stones should limit their intake of coffee to less than two cups or 16 ounces per day. Those that consume other forms of caffeine, like soda, should restrict them to a comparable amount. Analysts warn that drinkers should measure the ounces not the servings because many mugs and beverage containers are larger than 8 ounces.

Kidney stones are comprised of different elements and a key ingredient -- calcium. An increase in urinary calcium suggests a greater risk of developing stones. The more calcium in urine, the more likely stones will form.

Researchers decided to examine caffeine's affect on people prone to the problem. After 14 hours of fasting, they gave caffeinated water to 39 high-risk participants and nine without a history of stones. Urine was tested and evaluated two hours before and after participants drank the water.

Results indicate that those likely to form stones showed an increase in calcium and sodium – key components in developing stones. The participants with no history of kidney stones produced similar results.

Both groups also showed an increase of magnesium and citrate in their urine after drinking the caffeine. Those elements are thought to prevent stones. However, after calculating the levels of each, researchers concluded that the levels of magnesium and citrate created by the caffeine were not enough to combat the increased amount of calcium.

Yahoo News September 3, 2004

Dr. Mercola's Comment:

Surveys have found that 85 percent of Americans consume caffeine daily. In fact, the average American drinks 10 pounds of coffee – which translates into about 2.4 BILLION pounds each year.

With all that consumption, researchers could hardly ignore studying it.

Coffee may interfere with your body's ability to keep homocysteine and cholesterol levels in check, most likely by inhibiting the action of the vitamins folate, B12 or B6. In addition to increasing risk of kidney stones, coffee – more accurately caffeine – has been said to increase risk of:

- High Cholesterol
- Stroke
- Rheumatoid Arthritis

Despite this information, it still is a safer beverage than soft drinks or fruit drinks. Pure water is always your best option.
However, if you simply MUST drink coffee here are a few tips to help reduce the chances of harmful effects:

Use organic coffee – As I alluded to above, coffee is a heavily sprayed crop. Drinking organic coffee may reduce or eliminate your exposure to toxic herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers.

Look for "Swiss Water Process" decaf – If you are going to drink decaffeinated coffee, be sure that it is one that uses a non-chemical based method of decaffeination. The "Swiss Water Process" is a patented method and is the best choice. Most of the major brands are chemically decaffeinated, even if it says "Naturally Decaffeinated" right on the container. If you are unsure of the methods, contact the manufacturer.

Leave out sugar and milk – These are actually much worse for you than the coffee itself. Don't compound possible detrimental health effects by adding milk or sugar to your coffee.

Use unbleached filters – If you use a "drip" coffee maker, be sure to use non-bleached filters. The bright white ones, which most people use, are chlorine bleached and some of this chlorine will be extracted from the filter during the brewing process.