

COFFEE BREAK

BY JOSEPH A. ARANGIO, M.S., C.S.C.S.



You go to the gym a few days each week, eat well most of the time, control your stress levels and get enough shuteye. Yet your midsection looks more like a keg than a six-pack. After careful examination you recognize a trend: The seemingly innocent morning ritual involving a trendy coffee beverage from the local Starbucks or Dunkin' Donuts is making your pants snug. Not your regular steaming mug of java—we're talking about the latest super-sweet coffee drinks with peculiar Italian

names like Frappuccino and Dunkaccino. Yes, this concoction of brewed coffee, sugar, cream and flavoring may be sabotaging your quest for a washboard abdomen. We show you strategies to stay lean and still enjoy your sunrise cup of joe.

**BUYER
BEWARE:
SPECIALTY
COFFEES MAY
BE RESPONSIBLE
FOR YOUR
EXPANDING
WAISTLINE.**

Thrifty hormones

It's no surprise that rich coffee drinks are dense in sugars. When you consume ultra-sweet carbohydrates, your system reacts by producing the blood-sugar-lowering hormone insulin. Insulin is the thrifty hormone that encourages the

body to store excess blood sugar (glucose) as fat. Our ancestors relied on insulin's energy-conserving properties for survival—just in case it took a few days to catch the next meal or forage for that evening snack. Thanks to the Egyptians, who established the science of agriculture, carbohydrates are now plentiful. Stop by your local coffee shop and you'll find innocent-looking, carbohydrate-laden concoctions hiding among the less-caloric black coffees. Combine the fat-stockpiling nature of insulin with calorie-rich coffee beverages and you're left with a bulging belly. Even worse, high levels of body fat place you at a greater risk for diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

WHAT TO DRINK AT THE COFFEE HOUSE

GOOD CHOICE:

Dunkin' Donuts Coffee will wake you up without the empty calories. (Serving Size: 10 oz; Calories: 5; Carbohydrates: 1g; Fat: 0g)

Starbucks' Drip coffee — nothing added. (Serving Size: 8 oz; Calories: 5; Carbohydrates: 1g; Fat: 0g)

NOT-SO-GOOD CHOICE:

Dunkin' Donuts Coffee Coolatta® with Cream & Chocolate Mint Cookie Coolatta Whirl-Ins is not only wordy but boasts some alarming nutritional information (Serving Size: 16 oz; Calories: 460; Carbohydrates: 58g; Fat: 24g)

Starbucks' Caffé Mocha — with whole milk and whipped cream. (Serving Size: 16 oz; Calories: 370g; Carbohydrates: 40g; Fat: 21g)



STRATEGY 1

Control your hormones with portion management

Match a portion of carbohydrates with a protein portion to balance your hormone levels and prevent you from storing excess calories as fat, recommends Barry Sears, Ph.D., biochemist and author of *The Zone*. "Carbohydrates raise insulin while protein triggers the release of glucagon, which stimulates the body to release stored energy," says Dr. Sears. The two hormones rise and fall in a chemical balancing act. "The easiest way to keep your body in balance is to combine a fist-sized protein portion with a similarly sized portion of dense carbohydrates, like pasta or a potato. If you choose a less-dense carbohydrate, broccoli or green beans for example, you can have two portions," adds Sears. Translation: Those syrupy coffee drinks have no place in a sensible meal plan—if you can't resist, combine the sweet coffee beverage with 5 ounces to 6 ounces of turkey to discourage high levels of insulin, adds Sears.

STRATEGY 2

Create a meal schedule

When you gulp down a mocha sugar shake, remember that you're getting a meal's worth of calories. If you don't adjust your food intake, you'll end up taking in more calories than needed, says Susan M. Kleiner, Ph.D., R.D., co-author of *Power Eating*. "The refined sugar and fat comes in without any of the micronutrients, which in turn leaves you open to nutritional deficit," says Dr. Kleiner. Effective nutrition strategies necessitate frequent eating spaced throughout the day. Forget about the traditional breakfast-lunch-dinner that your mother preached—this type of eating will slow your metabolism to a creeping halt and encourage your body to store fat. A success-

ful dietary strategy involves eating nutrient-dense, portion-controlled meals every two to three hours, from dawn to dusk, for a total of five or six feedings daily. "Increased meal frequency stimulates fat burning, preserves lean muscle, improves the body's use of protein and reduces appetite," says Kleiner.

STRATEGY 3

Watch out for the midday slump

The tired feeling you experience daily around 4 p.m. is due to a drop in blood sugar. This is when you'll be most susceptible to the high-fat, sugary goodness lurking at your local Dunkin' Donuts. "Specialty coffees may satisfy a grumbling stomach, but you'll be hungry in about an hour," says Dr. Sears. So steer clear of that high-sugar dessert drink to prevent an insulin surge and the resultant potbelly. Instead, choose a low-carbohydrate alternative like black coffee—minus the sugar and cream. And make sure the soda jerk runs the brew through a filter to remove the cholesterol-elevating compounds. According to research published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, coffee made without a filter, in the French press for example, can raise your cholesterol up to 20 points. Test subjects who consumed filtered coffee demonstrated very little increase in cholesterol scores.¹

STRATEGY 4

Beware of bellyache

Don't be that guy in the genie pants and muscle shirt sipping a coffee-flavored slushee during a workout. Unless you're a marathon runner, you should avoid high-carbohydrate drinks—including syrupy coffee cocktails. "Any drink with more than 15 grams to 20 grams of carbohydrates per 8 ounces may cause bloating and stomach distress," says Dennis McGorry Jr., M.D., physician at Bryn Mawr Hospital in Bryn Mawr, Penn. For workouts lasting less than one hour, he recommends plain water. "Drink 7 ounces to 10 ounces of water every 10 to 20 minutes during exercise," says McGorry. Water will not only replace lost fluids, it will save you unnecessary calories.



CONCLUSION

Keep in mind that the major sources of saturated fats in the average diet come from whole milk dairy products. An 8-ounce cup of coffee without the cream and sugar will hardly make your pants snug. So don't blame the regular java for the spare tire around your waist. If you don't like your coffee black, choose low-fat or non-fat milk instead of heavy cream. In case you surrender to the decadent temptation, at least wait until your free day—then jump off the carbo-wagon and get back to portion-controlled eating.

Sugary drinks cause insulin release and, sooner or later, tight pants. Tight pants are uncool, unless you're a member of the *Rolling Stones*. Wait, tight pants are never cool. So avoid the Fattuccino—your waistline will thank you.

References Cited:

¹S.H. Jee, et al., "Coffee Consumption and Serum Lipids: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Clinical Trials," *Am. J. Epidemiol.* 153.4 (2001) : 353-362.