



Boost coffee and tea sales by pointing out their health benefits

A stroll past any Starbucks will reveal the depth of Americans' love for coffee. And now, operators who are following Starbucks' lead and profiting from their own premium coffee programs or unveiling new coffee or tea drinks have more to celebrate than big margins. It turns out that coffee and tea consumption may actually have health benefits.

Several recent studies have established that coffee and teas are filled with antioxidants, or substances that may protect cells from the damage caused by unstable molecules known as free radicals. That means there is increasing evidence that coffee and teas may help to prevent such diseases as heart disease, Alzheimer's, asthma, lupus, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, psoriasis or any other condition caused or exacerbated by oxidative inflammation.

Recently, a research article published in the prestigious *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found coffee to be sixth among the top 50 antioxidant-containing foods. The rankings were based on the amount of antioxidants found in a typical serving size. For a typical coffee or tea, that's about 6 ounces. Only blackber-

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Weighing In
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ries, walnuts, strawberries, artichokes and cranberries contained more antioxidants per serving than did coffee.

Another study suggests that black tea is second to coffee in its antioxidant content, followed by bananas. Other studies suggest that green tea yields more antioxidants than coffee or black tea. Regardless of ranking, there is no denying that these drinks contain significant beneficial antioxidants. And, obviously, the stronger the brew, the greater the concentration of antioxidants.

There are at least six recent epidemiological studies from such institutions as Harvard University that suggest that coffee drinkers have fewer cases of diabetes and heart disease than do noncoffee drinkers. A larger number of studies have proposed that the consumption of green and black teas encourages the reduction of inflammatory diseases.

It is crucial to understand that the research discussed in this article involves both chemical analysis and epidemiological evidence. In other words, the research comes from two directions: one, the amount of antioxidants found in commonly eaten foods, and two, the association of these high-antioxidant-containing foods and reduction or prevention of inflammatory disease.

While coffee and tea can boast about their antioxidant

content, so can most plant products. In the study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, the foods with the highest-ranked levels of antioxidants were plant foods. Out of 1,100 foods studied, the top 300 antioxidant-containing foods were plants, which, of course, includes fruits and vegetables. This lends strong credibility to the idea that meals featuring more fruits, vegetables and coffee and tea beverages can contain a host of beneficial antioxidants.

As ever, there is a caveat to completely enjoying your espresso. Moderation counts because coffees and teas also contain caffeine, according to the University of Michigan University Health Service, which acts as a stimulant by exerting a strong effect on the central nervous system. When caffeine is consumed in moderate doses — or up to 200 milligrams, which is equal to two cups of coffee — it can help people feel temporarily more alert and less sleepy. In most cases, there are no negative side effects at this level.

However, there may be side effects such as increased blood pressure, breathing rate, heart rate, heartburn or anxiety if about 1,000 milligrams of caffeine, or 10 6-ounce cups of coffee, are consumed regularly. A 6-ounce cup of coffee contains about 100 milligrams of caffeine: both black and green teas contain about 40 to 60 milligrams.

So if coffee or tea sales need a boost, you can perk them up by tipping off customers to the potential health benefits of enjoying their lattes in moderation. ■

Sound Bites

Cudden: Allergies should be taken seriously

Questions about food allergies and dietary concerns have become an important part of the script for servers at Ruby Foo's Times Square in New York, the Asian-theme eatery from New York-based restaurant operator B.R. Guest. Servers address the topic up front instead of waiting for patrons to bring up concerns after the extensive menu has been explained. Laurel Cudden, B.R. Guest's director of food safety, said the more information a server has at the start of the ordering process, the easier it is to help the patron order. A similar approach is used at the company's other concepts.

12 menu items that are wheat-free.

What sparked the allergy program? I understand the seriousness of food allergies. When I started working with one of our chefs to create this program, he coincidentally found out his daughter had serious food allergies. She had a life-threatening reaction to peanuts.



Laurel Cudden

How does the system work?

The server tells the chef that a guest at table X has an allergy to peanuts, for example, and asks if it is OK for them to order a particular dish based on ingredients, preparation or cooking method. The chef will say yes or no. When the server enters the order in our computer

system, the chef then marks the ticket with a red stamp that says "allergy." He also stamps the expediting sheets he passes to the cooks and writes which ingredients to exclude. There are verbal instructions too, which also signal staff to use fresh tongs and bowls and cutting boards, even though they already sanitize them between every use.

Have you ever had an incident?

As far as I'm aware of, we have not.

— Louise Kramer

What do you teach servers?

We give extensive training on what the ingredients are in all the dishes.

We talk to them about what the major eight allergies are — peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, wheat and soy — and how to respond when a guest makes inquiries about ingredients. We prompt them to ask if their questions are specific to any dietary preferences or allergies.

How often do you get requests?

It varies. We can get a dozen a night. We're getting a lot of requests for gluten-free dishes lately. We have come up with

NEWS DIGESTS

Study examines how health concerns impact dining-out choices

WASHINGTON — Consumers care about health when they are choosing a restaurant, but they also weigh convenience and entertainment value, according to an October report on dining habits from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The report looked at whether consumers want healthy food at restaurants and whether knowledge of health and nutrition impacts their choices.

Those in search of healthful foods are 19 percent more likely to opt for full-service over quick-service restaurants, according to a 2002 survey of 700 New Jersey residents that provided the basis for the USDA findings. These patrons may incorrectly believe they will get more healthful fare if they eat at a full-service restaurant, the report said. However, the report said, some studies have found that meals and snacks consumed at full-service restaurants are not nutritionally superior to fast food.

Survey respondents ranked taste ahead of nutrition and convenience when asked to rank the importance of food attributes. The report noted that Americans are consuming about half their meals away from home, and that these meals tend to have more calories and be less healthful than foods prepared at home.

Americans still not eating enough fruits and veggies, study says

CHICAGO — Americans are not eating close to the amount of fruits and vegetables recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid food guide. The guide recommends 2 to 6.5 cups per day, depending on the age the individual calculating his or her nutritional needs.

According to a study of produce consumption by the USDA and the National Cancer Institute, boys ages 14 to 18 fared the worst. They are eating a mere 0.7 percent of the recommended 5 cups of produce per day for their age group. Children ages 2 to 3 fared the best, with 48 percent consuming the recommended 1 cup per day, researchers reported in the September issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* based here.

MyPyramid was introduced in 2005 as a more flexible dietary guideline than the 1992 Food Guide Pyramid, which recommended that all Americans eat five servings of produce per day.

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