

Ask a Dermatologist: Is Coffee Bad For Your Skin?

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You always hear people swear that giving up [insert vice here] changed *everything* for their skin. Most often, it's [dairy](#), [sugar](#), or wheat, but lately, the rumors have been centered around coffee. As is the case with most of our favorite vices, rumor has it that your daily caffeine habit could be wreaking havoc on your skin. But is drinking coffee really all that bad? We wish the answer was a simple yes or no, but as it turns out, it's a little more complicated than that. To find out the truth about our favorite caffeinated beverage, we interviewed dermatologists [Gary Goldenberg, MD](#), and [Whitney Bowe, MD](#).

Before you decide to quit coffee cold turkey, keep reading to see what they have to say.

MEET THE EXPERT

Gary Goldenberg is a cosmetic dermatologist at Goldenberg Dermatology in NYC and an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital.



Coffee Can Raise Your Stress Levels

One of the biggest rumors surrounding coffee is that it causes acne, and well, that's not entirely false. As Goldenberg explains it, the overconsumption of [caffeine has been associated with stress](#), which is associated with acne. So how much coffee is too much? The [FDA suggests](#) a maximum of 400 milligrams a day (roughly four or five cups). But when it comes to your skin, Bowe suggests limiting yourself to one or two cups a day. Too much of anything can be a bad thing, so when you drink coffee, do so in moderation.

MEET THE EXPERT

Whitney Bowe is a board-certified dermatologist and the author of *Dirty Looks: The Secret to Beautiful Skin*. She is based in NY.

How You Take Your Coffee Could Cause Breakouts

Goldenberg says inorganic milk, white sugar, and syrup can negatively affect your hormones and lead to acne. If you regularly take your coffee with sweetener and whatever cream you have on hand, then, yes, your coffee drink could be the source of your breakouts. Pass on the sugar and dairy milk (and yep, that means scale back on your fancy, sugary Starbucks concoction), and opt for an unsweetened nondairy creamer instead.

Bad Coffee Can Disrupt Your Gut Flora

It's also important to note that not all coffee beans are created equal. "Poor quality coffee, especially if drank with dairy products sourced from cows injected with antibiotics, can disrupt gut flora," Goldenberg says.

"Organic coffee has not been associated with gut flora disruption." But why exactly is a gut flora important? As Bowe explains it, if your gut is inflamed, that will show up as inflammation in your skin. "Eating the wrong types of foods, unfortunately, slows down digestion and creates a shift in the type of bacterial environment in your gut," Bowe says.

"It affects your gut microbiome, and that, in turn, leads to leaky gut, and leaky gut translates to leaky skin." In short, coffee quality is key. If you're going to drink coffee every day, splurge on the organic beans.

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Coffee Beans Are Packed With Antioxidants

But wait—before you decide to quit your morning cup of coffee, you should know that when done right, [coffee is actually a good habit to have](#). "Caffeine has been shown to be beneficial for your skin," Goldenberg says. "It has antioxidant properties and has been shown to be anti-inflammatory." You might be familiar with free radicals, but for the uninitiated, they're the damaging molecules that cause premature aging, and according to [some studies](#), they can even lead to acne. In other words, they're the skin enemy.

Antioxidants work to fight free-radical damage, and they can be applied topically or also ingested. Bowe recommends that her patients who are particularly prone to breakouts up their intake of antioxidants. If you're a big-time coffee drinker, good news: Caffeine is a great source of antioxidants. Actually, [studies show](#) it's one of the biggest sources of antioxidants for many people. Who knew?



Coffee Can Be Beneficial When Applied Topically

If you'd rather quit drinking coffee altogether than drink it black, we don't blame you. It can be hard to adjust to the bitter taste of coffee when you're used to all the sweeteners and creamers. But that doesn't mean you have to forgo all the skin-loving benefits of the morning beverage. Goldenberg says topical products that contain caffeine also have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Although the effects are short-term, Goldenberg says the caffeine in topical products can decrease the appearance of cellulite by dehydrating the tissue. Bowe adds that coffee grounds also work reduce swelling and puffiness, which is why you'll commonly find this ingredient in eye creams and treatments.

The takeaway: When consumed correctly, coffee is good for your skin. But if you're one of those who can't bear the taste of plain coffee, shop some coffee-infused products below to make caffeine-free mornings a little more bearable.



French Girl Organics Café Noir Body Polish (\$44)

SHOP



100% Pure Organic Coffee Bean Caffeine Eye Cream (\$26)

SHOP



Frank Body Creamy Face Scrub (\$22)

SHOP