

Instant Coffee Linked to Higher Risk of Vision Loss

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Instant coffee increases dry age-related macular degeneration risk nearly sevenfold compared to other coffee types, according to genetic studies
- › Each cup of instant coffee causes equivalent of 0.38 years additional biological aging by shortening protective telomeres on chromosomes
- › Instant coffee contains more contaminants like acrylamide, lead, and advanced glycation end products due to intense heat processing methods
- › Filtered coffee using freshly ground beans shows no harmful effects on telomeres or eye disease risk in research studies
- › Experts recommend completely avoiding instant coffee and switching to organic, shade-grown filtered coffee to protect long-term health

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), around 19,828,000 Americans currently have some form of [age-related macular degeneration](#) (AMD).¹ This condition causes poor sight in low light conditions, blurred vision, blank spots in your field of vision, or issues in analyzing colors. It is broken down further into two types:²

- **Dry AMD** – Almost 90% of those who have AMD have the dry type. It is marked by drusen – tiny yellow protein deposits – building up under your macula, the central part of your retina.

- **Wet AMD** – This occurs when blood vessels develop under your macula and retina, which then leak blood.

AMD can be inherited, but it also appears in people with no family history of it. Other factors that increase your risk of AMD include age, smoking cigarettes, and high blood pressure.³ Interestingly, one seemingly innocuous habit – drinking instant coffee – has been implicated in the progression of AMD.

Instant Coffee Greatly Increases Risk of Eye Disease

In a study published in *Food Science & Nutrition*, researchers explored how consumption of instant coffee is linked to AMD. Using genetic data and varied statistical analysis methods, the team tested their hypothesis to see if the connection was more than just coincidence. Specifically, they used a method called Mendelian randomization, which looks at genetic variants associated with behaviors to test whether drinking instant coffee truly causes vision loss.⁴

The study population was drawn from massive datasets of genetic information, with particular focus on those carrying risk markers for AMD. Unlike standard observational studies that can be clouded by lifestyle factors like smoking or poor diet, this approach removes much of the guesswork.

- **The findings laid out a clear impact on eye health** – For every increase in instant coffee consumption, the odds of developing dry AMD shot up nearly sevenfold. That is an extraordinary increase – one that should make anyone who relies on instant coffee stop and reconsider.⁵

"Our results revealed a genetic correlation between instant coffee consumption and dry AMD, with each standard deviation (SD) increase in instant coffee intake associated with a corresponding odds ratio (OR) of approximately 6.92 for dry AMD, indicating a 6.92-fold increased risk."

- **Different methods were used to test the hypothesis** – The researchers used three different statistical methods – genetic correlation, Mendelian randomization, and Bayesian colocalization – to test the strength of the link. Two of those methods showed a strong causal connection between instant coffee and AMD risk.
- **How instant coffee fared against other types** – Instant coffee was consistently singled out as an AMD risk, while other coffee preparations (ground and decaffeinated) were not flagged in the same way. This means the problem is unique to instant coffee – the additives, processing techniques, and contaminants specific to it are the culprits.
- **The mechanisms behind instant coffee's effects** – The study points out that AMD is linked with [oxidative stress](#), mitochondrial dysfunction, and buildup of toxic byproducts in the retina.⁶

"[S]tudies have reported that the production of instant coffee may lead to the formation of potentially harmful substances such as acrylamide and advanced glycation end products (AGEs), which have been implicated in oxidative stress and inflammatory responses in retinal cells.

Instant coffee is made by brewing a concentrated extract and then spray-drying or freeze-drying the liquid; this intense heat and concentration generates high levels of Maillard reaction byproducts and often involves added ingredients (e.g., sugar, creamer). Other types of coffee do not have similar additives."

The takeaway here is clear – if you stop drinking instant coffee, you reduce your odds of AMD by almost seven times. By making a switch now, you give yourself the best chance at preserving your vision as you age. If you do use instant coffee formulations, make sure the coffee is certified organic and free of hazardous contaminants such as heavy metals.

Instant Coffee Found to Speed Up Aging

Not only does instant coffee increase your risk of AMD, it's also been found to age you faster overall. In a study published in *Nutrients*, researchers investigated how different types of coffee affect biological aging, using data from the UK Biobank. The researchers focused on telomere length.⁷

- **Telomere length serves as a marker for aging** — Every time your cells divide, telomeres get shorter. When they become too short, the cell stops dividing or dies. This natural process is one of the reasons aging happens. According to the researchers:⁸

"Telomeres, protein-protected short sequences of DNA repeats located at the ends of chromosomes, are shortened with each somatic cell cycle. Telomeres preserve hereditary information by keeping chromosomes stable, and shorten after each cell division. Therefore, telomere length, as a biological indicator of aging, dictates the cell's proliferative history."

- **Instant coffee ages you faster** — The researchers separated instant coffee, filtered coffee, and overall coffee consumption, and what they found was striking. Both total coffee and instant coffee were linked to shorter telomeres, but instant coffee stood out as being far more harmful.

Each cup of instant coffee was associated with the equivalent of 0.38 years of additional aging, compared to just 0.12 years per cup for general coffee intake. Filtered coffee, in contrast, had no measurable link to telomere shortening. Essentially, the way your coffee is prepared, and what's in it, makes a big difference for your long-term health.

- **The effects of instant coffee are dose-dependent** — The more instant coffee someone drank, the shorter their telomeres were on average. For every extra cup of instant coffee per day, telomeres are shortened by nearly half a year of biological aging. Over time, this adds up significantly.

- **A deeper analysis of the findings** – The researchers confirmed the link using Mendelian randomization. This strengthens the case that instant coffee itself contributes to accelerated biological aging.
- **Ingredients in instant coffee harm your health** – The study also explored why instant coffee behaves so differently from filtered coffee. One key reason is contaminants, such as heavy metals:⁹

"The mineral lead in instant coffee was more abundant than that in other coffee types, and long-term consumption of instant coffee may result in excessive lead. Additional substances added to commercial instant coffee, such as creamer and flavoring agents, might partially explain the negative effect."

- **Other effects of instant coffee** – Aside from speeding up aging, the researchers noted that this highly processed product puts you at risk for other diseases:¹⁰

"Ground coffee could reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes, whereas instant coffee might increase the risk. Instant coffee consumption has been proven to be associated with obesity. Compared to women who did not regularly drink coffee, those who drank instant coffee had a higher risk of developing breast cancer."

Instant coffee was regarded as a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease and frailty in the elderly. Instant coffee might have the effect of shortening telomere length, and might lead to the occurrence and development of diseases."

- **The right coffee is safer for your health** – According to the researchers, filtered coffee had no effect on the length of telomeres, indicating that freshly ground coffee is the best way to enjoy it without affecting your health:¹¹

"We found that coffee intake and instant coffee intake were negatively correlated with telomere length, but there was no significant correlation between filtered coffee and telomere length through the observational analyses. Mendelian randomization analyses supported the results of observational analyses."

How to Protect Yourself from the Dangers of Instant Coffee

As shown by the published research, instant coffee has clear risks to your health. So, if you've been drinking it for the sake of convenience, consider switching to brewed coffee. That said, here are my recommendations:

- 1. Cut out instant coffee** — Your first step is to stop drinking instant coffee. The studies show that instant coffee shortens telomeres and raises your risk of eye disease almost sevenfold.

If you are someone who relies on a quick morning cup, this is where you make the biggest change — choose filtered coffee instead. It doesn't carry the same risks and was shown in research to have no harmful effect on telomeres.

- 2. Switch to safer coffee preparations** — If you enjoy instant coffee and don't want to part with it, opt for certified organic varieties that have been tested to be free of contaminants.
- 3. Try these coffee recipes** — Not a fan of drinking black coffee? There are other ways to change the flavor to something that suits your palate. For example, consider adding some cinnamon for a warmer flavor and a natural sweetener (such as real [stevia](#) leaves) to take some of the bitterness away. You can also make a simple latte by mixing your coffee with a bit of maple syrup or raw honey along with a splash of raw, grass fed milk.

4. Where to find the best coffee – With coffee being one of the most consumed beverages in the world, it's no surprise that most beans sold are heavily sprayed with pesticides to maximize profits, which pose numerous threats to your health.

For the best flavor and health benefits, I recommend you buy coffee from certified organic producers. If they are certified biodynamic, that's even better. Another thing to note is that coffee is a shade-loving plant, so if the beans you're buying are shade-grown, that means you're getting your money's worth.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Instant Coffee and Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Q: What is age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and why should I care?

A: AMD damages the macula, the central part of your retina that controls sharp vision. It is the leading cause of vision loss in older adults. Early signs include blurry central vision, trouble reading, seeing straight lines as wavy, and poor vision in dim light. If untreated, AMD progresses to severe vision loss or blindness. About 19.8 million Americans already live with some form of AMD.

Q: How does instant coffee affect my risk of developing AMD?

A: Research published in Food Science & Nutrition showed that instant coffee increases the risk of developing dry AMD nearly sevenfold. Other types of coffee, like filtered or ground coffee, were not associated with this risk.

Q: Does instant coffee also affect my overall aging process?

A: Yes. A study in *Nutrients* found that instant coffee shortens telomeres – the protective caps on your DNA that determine how fast your cells age. Each cup of instant coffee was linked to about 0.38 years of additional biological aging. In contrast, filtered coffee showed no harmful effect on telomere length.

Q: Why is instant coffee worse than filtered coffee?

A: Instant coffee is processed at high heat. This process generates harmful byproducts like acrylamide and advanced glycation end products (AGEs), both of which increase oxidative stress and inflammation in your cells. On top of that, studies found higher levels of contaminants such as lead in instant coffee.

Q: What can I do right now to protect my health if I drink instant coffee?

A: The simplest and most effective step is to stop drinking instant coffee. Switch to filtered coffee made from organic, shade-grown beans to avoid contaminants and preserve the benefits of antioxidants. If you do opt for instant coffee varieties, make sure they're certified organic and tested to ensure they're free of heavy metals and other toxic contaminants.

Sources and References

- ¹ [CDC, VEHSS Modeled Estimates: Age-Related Macular Degeneration \(AMD\)](#)
- ² [Cleveland Clinic, Macular Degeneration](#)
- ³ [Johns Hopkins, Age-Related Macular Degeneration](#)
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- ^{7, 8, 9, 10, 11} [Nutrients. 2023 Mar 10;15\(6\):1354](#)