

A 'heathenish liquor'? A cure for cancer? The history of coffee is full of surprises

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. These countries are the top six coffee producers in the world. Put them in order from 1 (the top producer) to 6 (the lowest producer in this selection).

Honduras
Colombia
Ethiopia
Brazil
Vietnam
Indonesia

2 Key words

a. Find the words in the text that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a noun meaning *the part of your body where solid waste is formed* _____
(paragraph 1)
2. an adjective meaning *good for you* _____ (paragraph 1)
3. an adjective meaning *bad for you* _____ (paragraph 1)
4. a noun meaning *an illness or medical condition* _____ (paragraph 2)
5. an adjective meaning *feeling that you want to sleep* _____ (paragraph 4)
6. a noun meaning *a document signed by many people that asks someone in authority to do something* _____ (paragraph 5)
7. a noun meaning *a drink* _____ (paragraph 6)
8. a verb meaning *to criticise someone in public* _____ (paragraph 7)
9. an adjective meaning *differing in an opposite way* _____ (paragraph 8)
10. an adverb meaning *especially* _____ (paragraph 8)
11. a verb meaning *say something such as a law is wrong and change it* _____
(paragraph 9)
12. an adverb meaning *almost completely* _____ (paragraph 9)

b. Use some of the words from task A to complete the sentences. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. When people feel upset, a hot _____ may help them relax and feel better.
2. The referee _____ his initial decision after looking at the video replay.

A 'heathenish liquor'? A cure for cancer? The history of coffee is full of surprises

Level 2: Intermediate

3. My doctor prescribed a new medicine that makes me feel tired and _____. I think I'd better take a nap.
4. The toy was so popular during the last holiday season that it was _____ sold out by the end of November.
5. The students signed a _____ to reinstate the teacher who had been unjustly fired.
6. Many doctors believe that coffee is _____ to people's health.

A 'heathenish liquor'? A cure for cancer? The history of coffee is full of surprises

Level 2: Intermediate

Jonathan Morris

2 April, 2024

- 1 Last week, a study was published showing that people with bowel cancer who drink coffee—quite a lot of coffee, two to four cups a day—are less likely to suffer a return of the disease. It is true that coffee does have an effect on the body, but whether that effect is beneficial or detrimental has been the subject of arguments since the 15th century, when Sufi mystics began drinking it.
- 2 At first, people thought coffee was a sort of medicine. Turkish merchants brought coffee to Venice, where it was prescribed for digestive system disorders. It was drunk cold. Europe's first coffee houses appeared in 1650s London. By 1663, there were 82 coffee houses registered in the City of London. Customers were attracted by the health benefits the new drink was supposed to have.
- 3 According to a leaflet used at that time by coffee-house owners, the drink "fortifies the heart ... is very good to help digestion ... is good against sore eyes ... and against head-aches".
- 4 The leaflet also said that coffee could stop people from feeling drowsy but warned them that they should not drink it after supper because it would prevent them from sleeping. For merchants, doing business over coffee was better than trying to maintain concentration while drinking beer in taverns.
- 5 Not everyone agreed. The 1674 Women's Petition Against Coffee complained about "excessive use of coffee" by their husbands. The petition's call for men to start drinking beer again suggests the petition was actually produced by pub owners rather than wives protesting against their husbands drinking coffee.
- 6 Negative advertising reappeared two centuries later in the US. The businessman CW Post made criticising coffee an art form, enabling him to become a millionaire just seven years after starting up a business manufacturing Postum, a wheat beverage, in 1895.
- 7 Post gaslit coffee drinkers through his adverts' references to such conditions as coffee heart, coffee neuralgia and brain fog. One had the words, "Try leaving off coffee for 10 days and use Postum Food coffee." Ironically, Post was a secret coffee drinker.
- 8 Since the 1960s, mass surveys of coffee drinkers have shown contradictory evidence of its impact. Early studies identified a strong negative connection with overall health, probably because they didn't allow for associated lifestyle choices – most notably smoking. In 1991, the World Health Organization listed coffee as a possible cause of cancer, but in 2016, this was changed as other studies have shown a larger number of the positive effects of coffee drinking.
- 9 These effects may relate to the other hundreds of unique compounds in a single cup. The high quantities of fibre in brewed coffee may contribute to bowel health, and coffee contains plenty of antioxidants associated with protection against ageing and dementia. A court ruling in California in 2018 requiring roasters to put health warnings on roasted coffee as it contained the cancer-causing compound acrylamide was soon overturned because the concentrations were so low it was virtually impossible that drinking coffee alone could give people cancer.

© Guardian News and Media 2024

First published in *The Guardian*, 02/04/2024

A 'heathenish liquor'? A cure for cancer? The history of coffee is full of surprises

Level 2: Intermediate

3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. People began drinking coffee in the 15th century.
2. The first coffee houses in Europe appeared in London in 1663.
3. The coffee house leaflet said that coffee was good for people's health.
4. It also said coffee was better than beer if people wanted to concentrate.
5. The American businessman CW Post had a coffee-making business.
6. He tried to make coffee drinkers believe that coffee was beneficial to their health.
7. CW Post never drank coffee himself.
8. Mass surveys of coffee drinkers have produced different evidence of the effect of coffee.
9. The World Health Organization says that coffee causes cancer.
10. The large amount of fibre in coffee is good for you.

4 Key language

a. Match the words from column A with those from column B to form phrases from the article.

A	B
1. digestive	form
2. health	choices
3. art	ruling
4. brain	system
5. lifestyle	benefits
6. court	fog

b. Use the collocations from task A to complete the sentences below.

1. I couldn't answer any of the test questions. I think I was suffering from _____.
2. Smoking and drinking alcohol are unhealthy _____.
3. Decorating cakes is truly an _____; so many different techniques and materials can be used to create beautiful pastries.
4. The defendant was happy with the _____; he was cleared of all charges.
5. Doing exercise regularly can provide different _____.

A 'heathenish liquor'? A cure for cancer? The history of coffee is full of surprises

Level 2: Intermediate

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Coffee is the best drink in the world."
- "Too much of any food or drink is bad for your health."

6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find more information about coffee's positive and negative effects. Find as much information as possible.

b. Present your findings to your class.