Coffee health kick

A couple of coffees a day may keep the doctor away

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TWO or more coffees a day may keep the doctor away, with new Melbourne research showing coffee can fight liver disease and other conditions.

The impact of drinking coffee can be so great that just two cups a day was found to reduce the obvious signs of damage to a hepatitis C patient’s liver by 13 per cent, according to the Monash Health and Monash University study.

For people with fatty liver — the most common form of liver disease, affecting more than one in 10 Australians — drinking four coffees a day was shown to reduce liver stiffness by 24 per cent.

The study of 1130 liver disease patients showed that even when risk factors such as weight, alcohol and smoking were taken into account, coffee was able to reduce the impact of their conditions.

After presenting results of the study in San Francisco yesterday, Dr Alex Hodge said it was worth drinking a cuppa for good health.

“I certainly wouldn’t advocate drinking 20 cups a day, but a moderate intake of coffee, particularly if you have liver disease, is certainly something you shouldn’t shy away from,” Dr Hodge said.

“This is specifically coffee. Caffeine is one of a thousand substances contained in coffee, so it is probably more than just the caffeine. Depending on the liver disease a person has, the effects vary.”

While high coffee consumption has been linked to high blood pressure, heart disease and anxiety, Dr Hodge said most of the associations were not well supported by research or did not have long-term impacts.

The exact way coffee is able to bolster the liver is not known; however, Dr Hodge believes it may be able to turn off the process liver diseases use to damage the organ, allowing the body’s normal repair system to help.

After initiating the study in 2012, the Monash researchers gathered coffee-drinking data from 1130 patients with hepatitis C, hepatitis B and fatty liver, finding significant health improvements in those having regular cuppas.

“Liver disease does not give you symptoms until it is too late, so there is no harm in having moderate amounts of coffee,” he said.

“If you have high blood pressure, you have a bit of fat around your middle, high cholesterol, that is metabolic syndrome and you pretty much have liver disease whether you know it or not,” he said.