

Could Coffee Be Good for Your Teeth After All?

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Strong black coffee, it turns out, has the potential to break down bacterial biofilms, an example of which is cavity-causing dental plaque.

Research, published today (11 June) in SfAM's Letters in Applied Microbiology journal, describes how an extract of *Coffea canephora* – a coffee variety mostly grown in Vietnam and Brazil – appears to cause bacteria in tooth-associated biofilms to break down.

Lead researcher, Andréa Antonio, from Rio de Janeiro's Federal University, said "Dental plaque is a classic complex biofilm and it's the main culprit in tooth decay and gum disease. We are always looking for natural compounds – food and drink, even – that can have a positive impact on dental health."

Using milk teeth, donated to research by children, the team cultivated biofilms on tooth fragments using the bacteria in saliva samples. When the fragments were exposed in solution to an extract of the Vietnamese coffee beans, there were indications that the bacteria had burst open, or lysed.

Professor Antonio continued "Whilst this is an exciting result, we have to be careful to add that there are problems associated with excessive coffee consumption, including staining and the effects of acidity on tooth enamel. And if you take a lot of sugar and cream in your coffee, any positive effects on dental health are probably going to be cancelled out."

It is likely that it is the polyphenol chemicals in coffee that damage the biofilm bacteria, but further research is required to determine this. Ultimately, there could be a possibility of extracting just the useful chemicals to use, perhaps, in a mouthwash or toothpaste.

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Notes to Editors

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