All About Coffee

JB

The recent class action lawsuit against coffee chains in California has really increased the number of email inquiries I receive regarding the safety of coffee and the role of acrylamide in affecting human health. There is so much confusion around this topic because of conflicting reports regarding what coffee contains the most acrylamide, and may of these statements are either unsubstantiated or completely off base.

Make no mistake about it, acrylamide is a real health risk. So much so that some European countries have required warning labels on potato chip bags and other partially browned or burned carbohydrate-based foods. In essence, acrylamide forms when sugars or carbohydrates form cross-links with the amino acid asparagine under high heat. Fried foods generate massive amounts and high roasting temperatures used in the coffee industry to brown the green beans also produce acrylamide. However, it is a function of time and temperature and higher temperatures combined with longer roasting times produce both more acrylamide and a number of other harmful substances. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons for example are common in French Roasts and other highly burned coffee beans.

This research paper illustrates how some coffee had no detectable acrylamide while darker roasts had significant levels:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5288803/pdf/srep41995.pdf>

(Also, here is a great link to one of the best articles written on how and why coffee beans are burned:

<https://ineedcoffee.com/problem-blonde-roasts/> )

Of course there are many other upsides to choosing the very light or blond roasts. Higher antioxidant levels for one. Light roasts can have as much as 10x the antioxidant value and these have been well studied with respect to benefitting our health.

In addition to acrylamide, there are many other issues that can surface with beans that are mishandled. Mycotoxins for instance can be found in those beans that are left to dry with their fruit and become contaminated with mold. Water washed beans are the way to go, despite how wonderful “sun dried” may sound. Coffee beans grown at higher altitudes will typically have less mold-related issues, so knowing that they were grown higher in the mountains is an upside and besides, that is really where coffee trees are meant to grow.

Some companies tend to have the social and environmental pieces covered. One of those is Dean’s Beans of Orange, MA. Dean and his crew sell great quality coffee and also provide very fair compensation to those who grow it for them. I highly recommend their Uprising variety of light roasted coffee. It is not blond but is pretty close.

I hope that this makes your coffee choices easier. Enjoy!