

Запись 2 (3:30)

IS IT TIME TO GIVE UP CAFFEINE?

How exactly does coffee, and caffeine more generally, make us more energetic, efficient and faster? How could this little molecule possibly supply the human body energy without calories? Could caffeine be the proverbial free lunch, or do we pay a price for the mental and physical energy – the alertness, focus and stamina – that caffeine gives us?

Alas, there is no free lunch. It turns out that caffeine only appears to give us energy. Caffeine works by blocking the action of adenosine, a molecule that gradually accumulates in the brain over the course of the day, preparing the body to rest. Caffeine molecules interfere with this process, keeping adenosine from doing its job – and keeping us feeling alert. But adenosine levels continue to rise, so that when the caffeine is eventually metabolised, the adenosine floods the body's receptors and tiredness returns. So, the energy that caffeine gives us is borrowed, in effect, and eventually the debt must be paid back.

For as long as people have been drinking coffee and tea, medical authorities have warned about the dangers of caffeine. But until now, caffeine has been cleared of the most serious charges against it. The current scientific consensus is more than reassuring – in fact, the research suggests that coffee and tea, far from being deleterious to our health, may offer some important benefits, as long as they aren't consumed to excess. Regular coffee consumption is associated with a decreased risk of several cancers (including breast, prostate, colorectal and endometrial), cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease, dementia and possibly depression and suicide. (Though high doses can produce nervousness and anxiety, and rates of suicide climb among those who drink eight or more cups a day.)

My review of the medical literature on coffee and tea made me wonder if my abstention might be compromising not only my mental function but my physical health, as well. However, that was before I spoke to Matt Walker.

An English neuroscientist on the faculty at University of California, Berkeley, Walker, author of *Why We Sleep*, is single-minded in his mission: to alert the world to an invisible public-health crisis, which is that we are not getting nearly enough sleep, the sleep we are getting is of poor quality, and a principal culprit in this crime against body and mind is caffeine. Caffeine itself might not be bad for you, but the sleep it's stealing from you may have a price. According to Walker, research suggests that insufficient sleep may be a key factor in the development of Alzheimer's disease, arteriosclerosis, stroke, heart failure, depression, anxiety, suicide and obesity. "The shorter you sleep," he bluntly concludes, "the shorter your lifespan."

Walker grew up in England drinking copious amounts of black tea, morning, noon and night. He no longer consumes caffeine, save for the small amounts in his occasional cup of decaf.

