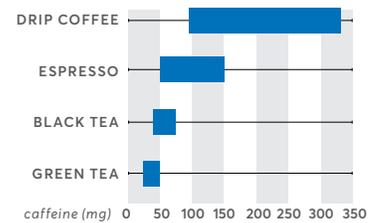


# Product Updates

The latest ratings from our labs

The range of caffeine in a typically sized brewed serving\*



## Not Your Average Joe

We're spilling the beans on the best coffees and coffee makers, secrets to making the perfect cup, and the surprising health benefits of java.

by **Julia Calderone**

**Stand Your Grounds**  
The Chemex coffee maker produces a balanced brew that earned high marks from our tasters.

**AMERICA HAS A CRAVING** for coffee. Though a steaming cup of joe has fueled the morning routines of many for generations, U.S. coffee consumption is now at an all-time high: Approximately 62 percent of us drink it every day—an increase of 5 percentage points over last year, according to the National Coffee Association.

Coffee drinkers across all age groups, from teens to seniors, have a seemingly insatiable thirst for the stuff. Many of us also have a growing preference for high-quality brew, with more than half the coffee we consume now classified as gourmet. It's a preference that's becoming much easier to indulge: The number of specialty coffee shops (think Intelligentsia, La Colombe Coffee Roasters, and Stumptown Coffee Roasters) increased tenfold between 1993 and 2013.

Most of the coffee we drink, though, is still brewed at home, in no-nonsense drip coffee makers. (See our ratings of the best on page 13.) In their ceaseless quest for the perfect cup, aficionados are also experimenting with new and rediscovered “artisanal” brewing methods, which, it turns out, really do make a difference in how coffee tastes. (See “Battle of the Brews,” on page 11.)

Retailers, eager to cater to devotees willing to pay premium prices, are offering fresh gourmet beans from around the world. According to market research firm Mintel, 30 new Ethiopian coffees hit the U.S. market between 2012 and 2016, more than from any other African country. (See our ratings of Ethiopian beans on page 12.)

But the best news about our collective coffee craze is that it appears to be good for us. A raft of research done in the past two decades has shown that coffee may well be linked to a reduced risk of a number of illnesses including certain cancers, heart disease, and perhaps even Alzheimer's disease.

### **Powerful Health Benefits**

A few decades ago coffee was considered not healthy and possibly harmful, says Edward Giovannucci, M.D., Ph.D., a researcher and professor of nutrition and epidemiology at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “But more recent studies seem to suggest that there's a benefit to drinking coffee,” he says.

The largest analysis we've seen examining coffee consumption and health, based on two studies that included more than 700,000 people from more than 10 countries, was published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* this past July.

Researchers from several universities across the U.S. and Europe found that coffee drinkers were less likely to die prematurely. In one study, those who drank one to three cups of coffee per day were 12 to 18 percent less likely to die during the study period from any cause, including cancer and heart, liver, and respiratory diseases. These results suggest that moderate coffee drinking is not detrimental to your health and could even have health benefits, says Neil Murphy, Ph.D., a scientist at the World Health

Organization and a lead author of one of the studies.

Other research published in the past five years has found that regular coffee drinkers seem to have a lower risk of type 2 diabetes and Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, as well as healthier livers, faster metabolism, and decreased risks of endometrial, prostatic, and colorectal cancers.

Studies have also confirmed what most of us already know: The caffeine in coffee can make you more alert and increase concentration, and may boost learning, decision-making, and performance on cognitive tasks.

Researchers think that the keys to coffee's health benefits are the antioxidants and other biologically active compounds responsible for its distinctive flavor. “It could be a combination of all of these compounds working together,” says V. Wendy Setiawan, Ph.D., an associate professor of preventive medicine at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine and a researcher on one of the studies published online in July.

### **Some Coffee Caution**

Increasing your coffee consumption beyond three cups a day might not up its health benefits. In fact, some studies have suggested a link between more than four or five cups a day and lower bone density, especially in those at higher risk of osteoporosis. (Caffeine potentially limits the body's absorption of calcium, but adding 2 tablespoons of milk to each cup can

help counteract this effect.)

Other researchers have found that certain compounds in coffee can raise cholesterol, although some evidence suggests that brewing with a filter might trap those compounds.

The caffeine in coffee can also have undesired effects: Just one cup can cause sleep problems and irritability in some people, and even regular coffee drinkers can experience headaches, nausea, anxiety, jitters, and increased blood pressure when they drink more than their bodies can handle.

How much caffeine is too much? U.S. government dietary guidelines say

that up to 400 mg per day—the amount in about two to four 8-ounce cups of coffee, depending on the type of bean and how it's brewed—can be part of a healthy diet for most adults.

Certain high-risk groups, however, should limit their caffeine intake. Pregnant women, for instance, should consume no more than 200 mg per day (the amount in about one 12-ounce cup of coffee), because caffeine could increase the risk of spontaneous abortion as well as growth delays in the fetus. Caffeine can also prevent the absorption of or create new side effects of common drugs such as

certain antibiotics, antidepressants, and antipsychotics. Ask your doctor whether it's safe to drink coffee if you're on medication.

For people who need to avoid caffeine, drinking decaffeinated coffee may also be a healthy option, Giovannucci says. Recent research suggests that decaf provides similar health benefits to caffeinated coffee but without the side effects. Decaf has slightly fewer antioxidants than a regular cup, but research shows that it's also associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes and many other perks.

—Additional reporting by Janet Lee

## The Truth About Coffee Packaging Claims

*Certain labels have genuine meaning; others don't. Here's how to tell the difference.*

IF YOU RELY on labels for information about a product's environmental impact and fair trade policies, you should know that certain claims on coffee labels are essentially meaningless: Terms including "ethically/sustainably farmed," "shade grown," and "direct trade" lack any legal definition or industry standards. But you can rely on certain seals to indicate the conditions under which coffee was grown. Charlotte Vallaeys, Consumer Reports' senior policy analyst and our top food labels expert, explains what some common labels mean.

—Christina Dabney



### USDA Organic

The term "organic" is strictly regulated by the Department of Agriculture. In the case of coffee farms, this seal means synthetic fertilizers and synthetic pesticides that can be harmful to farmers and to wildlife are banned. The label also ensures that soil quality is protected.



### Fairtrade

This seal indicates that the beans were sourced directly from small-scale farmers who were paid a fair price. The certification organization, Fairtrade International, sets a minimum price—enough to cover the costs of sustainable production—that must be paid directly to coffee producers. A premium added to the minimum price is distributed to coffee producers and must be invested in their communities or businesses.



### Fair Trade Certified

Unlike Fairtrade, this label does not indicate that the coffee was purchased directly from small-scale farmers. The beans can be grown on large coffee plantations, but these farms have to meet certain standards, including protecting farmworkers from unsafe working conditions. Farms must also pay workers at least the local minimum wage and implement a plan to increase that to a living wage over time.



### Bird Friendly Habitat

This seal certifies that the farm where the coffee was grown qualifies as a "bird friendly habitat" as defined by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. It means that coffee carrying this seal not only is organic but also was grown in an environment that protected biodiversity and maintained native trees so that the coffee farm could remain an important habitat for birds and other wildlife.



### Rainforest Alliance Certified

This seal means that some or all of the coffee in the bag is sourced from farms that have met standards aimed at promoting sustainability and protecting farmers, forests, wildlife, and local communities. But Rainforest Alliance standards for minimizing pesticide use and incorporating native trees are not as stringent as those behind the Bird Friendly Habitat designation.

# Battle of the Brews

We asked our expert tasters to evaluate coffee made using five popular methods. The results reveal that the flavor of the final product is shaped in part by the brewing technique you choose.

For a clean, balanced cup  
**Chemex**



**Chemex**  
\$46

### THE BREWER

This hourglass-shaped pour-over coffee maker differs from other pour-over models because of the Chemex-branded filters, which are made of heavy paper and designed to regulate the filtration rate and keep sediment out. The glass body has a wooden handle that wraps around the neck of the carafe. It's easy to pour coffee from the Chemex, but the narrow neck makes it difficult to clean by hand. The wooden handle isn't dishwasher-safe, but it can be easily removed.

### THE RESULTS

Coffee brewed in the Chemex earned high marks for complexity, acidity, and overall quality in our taste tests; the filter minimized the presence of solids in the cup. If you like an aromatic, balanced brew with sweet, juicy undertones, this one's for you.

For a bold, full-bodied taste  
**French Press**



**Bodum Chambord 8 Cup Coffee Maker**  
\$40

### THE BREWER

French presses brew by allowing coarsely ground beans to steep (usually for about 4 minutes) in hot water. The grounds are separated from the coffee and pushed to the bottom of the carafe when a built-in filter is depressed. This sizable Bodum Chambord brews up to eight cups at once, and it's easy to pour from. The fine-mesh filter forms a tight seal with the glass walls of the carafe, helping keep grounds out of the brewed coffee—a common problem with cheaper models.

### THE RESULTS

Without a paper filter, this coffee holds on to its natural oils, creating a full-bodied taste. The mesh filter holds back most of the grounds, but small, powderlike coffee grounds (called "fines") can remain in the brew, creating a somewhat viscous cup.

For a refined single serving  
**AeroPress**



**AeroPress Coffee Maker**  
\$30

### THE BREWER

This one-of-a-kind miniature coffee maker sits on top of a mug and is small enough to travel with. Mix water and grounds in the carafe, then plunge the top down to force the brewed mixture through a micro filter designed to capture even very fine particles. Our tester noted that the process is a bit precarious because the tool has to be balanced on top of a cup. It's also only big enough to brew a single cup at a time.

### THE RESULTS

The AeroPress produced a high-quality brew, with good body and aromatics but just a touch less complexity. The company claims that—unlike a French press—this method leaves "no grit in your cup," but our tasters found that the coffee sometimes contained a bit of fine coffee silt.

For a simple, quality brew  
**Pour-Over**



**Melitta 6-Cup Pour-Over Brewer**  
\$10

### THE BREWER

Most pour-over coffee makers are little more than a filter basket that sits on top of a glass or ceramic carafe. The basket is lined with a paper filter, into which the grounds are placed. This method puts you in control of a slow, careful pour over the entire bed of coffee, ensuring even distribution. The brewer is relatively easy to clean, dishwasher-safe—and cheap enough that you won't be heartbroken if the carafe shatters in the sink: The filter basket will work on top of other containers as well.

### THE RESULTS

This brewing method earned high marks. Our tasters found the pour-over coffee had full, juicy flavors that weren't too aggressive, with a smooth feel and sweet taste.

For easy, no-nonsense joe  
**Drip**



**Cuisinart PerfectTemp 14-Cup DCC-3200**  
\$100

### THE BREWER

In general, drip coffee makers force you to sacrifice some control, but convenience often trumps perfection, especially first thing in the morning. At the top of our drip ratings (see chart on page 13), this programmable model brews in the ideal temperature zone of 195° to 205° F and prepares 40 ounces in just 10 minutes. The controls are generally easy to use and intuitive.

### THE RESULTS

Scoring slightly lower than other methods in complexity, smoothness, and overall quality, the drip method is hard to beat on convenience. Our tasters noted a higher astringency, and the fruity, somewhat sweeter notes of the coffee were masked by a sharper acidity.

**Ratings** > **Better Beans** More coffees from Ethiopia are hitting store shelves than are gourmet grinds from any other African country.

Recommended	Rank	Product	Sensory Score	Specs		Price			Flavor Description
				Type	Darker Roast	Per Package	Per Pound	Per 6-oz. Serving or Per K-Cup	
✓	1	<b>La Colombe Coffee Roasters</b> Ethiopia-YirgZ (12 oz.)	84	Whole Bean		\$15	\$20	51¢	Vibrant cup with a nice level of sweetness balanced with citrus, fruity flavors, and a hint of honey. A good one to savor black. Medium body.
✓	2	<b>Green Mountain Coffee</b> Organic Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (16-count)	75	K-Cup		\$12	NA	75¢	Well-balanced, with notes of chocolate, fruit, and a trace of citrus. Medium to full body.
✓	3	<b>Birch Coffee</b> Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (12 oz.)	74	Whole Bean		\$15	\$20	51¢	Tangy, with nice fruity layers and notes of lemon, berry, honey, and floral. Lighter body.
✓	4	<b>Stumptown Coffee Roasters</b> Ethiopia Duromina (12 oz.)	73	Whole Bean		\$18	\$24	61¢	Tangy, with very nice aromatics that are citrusy, fruity (tastes of cherry and currants), and floral but a trace grassy. Medium body.
✓	5	<b>Green Mountain Coffee</b> Organic Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (10 oz.)	71	Whole Bean		\$10	\$16	40¢	Fruity (citrus), with dark-chocolate notes and a trace of honey. Moderately astringent, with a bit of smoke and woodiness. Medium body.
Ⓢ	6	<b>Trader Joe's</b> Organic Fair Trade Shade Grown Ethiopian (13 oz.)	70	Whole Bean	•	\$10	\$12	31¢	Strong, with bold, earthy flavors and notes of dark chocolate and fruit (dried fruit, cherry). Bitter and astringent. Medium to full body.
✓	7	<b>Irving Farm Coffee Roasters</b> Konga Ethiopia (12 oz.)	70	Whole Bean		\$17	\$23	57¢	Traces of fruit, citrus, and malt but more grassy and less complex than those more highly rated. Light to medium roast and body.
Ⓢ	8	<b>Coffee Beanery</b> Ethiopian Yirgacheffe (16 oz.)	69	Whole Bean		\$14	\$14	32¢	Chocolate and fruity notes with medium-high sweetness. Medium roast with a medium to full body.
Ⓢ	9	<b>Starbucks</b> Ethiopia (16 oz.)	68	Whole Bean	•	\$14	\$14	32¢	Dark roast that has a smoky, strong flavor. Balanced, with a nice level of sweetness and chocolate and fruit flavors. More bitter than most. Medium to full body.
✓	10	<b>Intelligentsia</b> Kurimi Organic Ethiopia (12 oz.)	68	Whole Bean		\$21	\$28	71¢	Bright and tangy, with lemony notes and traces of other fruit (berry), but slightly grassy. Light to medium body and roast.
✓	11	<b>Illy</b> MonoArabica Ethiopia (8.8 oz.)	68	Whole Bean		\$15	\$27	63¢	Chocolate and fruity top notes but a bit woody (old tasting). Medium roast and body.
✓	12	<b>The Coffee Bean &amp; Tea Leaf</b> Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (16 oz.)	67	Whole Bean	•	\$14	\$14	35¢	Nice sweetness but a trace smoky and burnt, with fruity, citrus, and toasty top notes. Somewhat bitter and astringent. Medium to full body.
✓	13	<b>Gloria Jean's Coffees</b> Ethiopian Yirgacheffe (16 oz.)	67	Whole Bean	•	\$16	\$16	37¢	Fruity, with cocoa and a little bit smoky and earthy. A trace woody. Fairly strong cup with medium to full body.
	14	<b>Archer Farms</b> (Target) Organic Ethiopian Yirgacheffe (10 oz.)	60	Whole Bean	•	\$6	\$10	24¢	Smoky notes with dark chocolate and fruity (dried fruit, berries) flavors. Fairly strong cup that's somewhat bitter, with medium to full body. Medium-dark roast.
	15	<b>Jim's Organic Coffee</b> Ethiopian Sidamo Nura Korate (12 oz.)	58	Whole Bean	•	\$15	\$20	51¢	Traces of fruit, cocoa, and smoky burnt flavors, with bitter notes and low sweetness and acidity. Medium to full body. Not bad but also not delicious. Medium-dark roast.
	16	<b>Peet's Coffee</b> Ethiopian Fancy (16 oz.)	55	Whole Bean	•	\$18	\$18	41¢	Earthy character, with a little fruit and chocolate but also some burnt, bitter notes. Fairly strong flavor with some astringency. Medium body. Darker roast.
	17	<b>Orleans Coffee</b> Ethiopia Harrar (16 oz.)	51	Whole Bean		\$10	\$10	24¢	Fruity and traces of berry. An off-note of ferment mars this coffee, which would otherwise have some positives. Medium roast and body.
	18	<b>Marley Coffee</b> One Love Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (8 oz.)	50	Whole Bean	•	\$12	\$24	55¢	A bit earthy, with some fruit that tastes pulpy. Off-note of ferment. Astringency also detracts. Medium-dark roast.

**HOW WE TEST:** Two coffee experts tested and rated 18 Ethiopian coffees. Except for the K-Cup, each was brewed

by drip method according to the coffee company's directions or standard recipe. Thirteen products were rated

Excellent or Very Good, and three of these are CR Best Buys. Those higher in the ratings generally had a more

complex flavor and fewer defects. Price is per package; prices per pound and per 6-ounce cup are also listed.

**Ratings** > **True Brew** Drip coffee makers are easy to use and can brew up to 14 cups at once. Most can be programmed the night before to start in the morning.



Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features			
					Brew Performance	Convenience	Carafe Handling	Brew Time (Min.)	Programmable	Small-Batch Setting	Brew-Strength Control
DRIP COFFEE MAKERS WITH CARAFE											
✓	1	<b>Cuisinart</b> PerfecTemp 14-Cup Programmable DCC-3200	88	\$100	↑	↑	↑	10	•	•	•
✓	2	<b>Cuisinart</b> PerfecTemp 14-Cup Programmable DCC-2800	85	\$100	↑	↑	↑	9	•	•	•
Ⓢ	3	<b>Hamilton Beach</b> 12 Cup Programmable 49465	84	\$25	↑	↑	↑	10	•		
✓	4	<b>Capresso</b> SG220 12-Cup	79	\$60	↑	↑	↑	9	•		•
	5	<b>KitchenAid</b> KCM1202OB	77	\$80	↑	↑	↑	8	•	•	•
✓	6	<b>Kenmore</b> Elite 12-Cup # 76772	76	\$90	↑	↑	↑	9	•	•	•
	7	<b>KitchenAid</b> 12-Cup With One-Touch Brewing KCM1204	76	\$100	↑	↑	↑	8	•	•	•
	8	<b>Black+Decker</b> CM4000S	74	\$40	↑	↑	↑	8	•		•
	9	<b>Bialetti</b> Triple Brew TSK-1180R2B 35018	73	\$100	↑	↑	↑	9	•	•	•
	10	<b>Frigidaire</b> Professional Programmable Drip FPDC12D7MS	73	\$100	↑	↑	↑	8	•		•
	11	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> Optimal Brew BVMC-PSTX95	72	\$100	↑	↑	↓	7	•		
	12	<b>Ninja</b> Bar Brewer CF085	71	\$170	↑	↑	↓	9	•	•	•
	13	<b>KitchenAid</b> Pour Over Brewer KCM0812	71	\$200	↑	↑	↓	12	•	•	•
	14	<b>Cooks</b> Programmable 12-cup (JCPenney)	70	\$30	↑	↑	↑	10	•		
	15	<b>Black+Decker</b> CM2020B	69	\$40	↓	↑	↑	9	•	•	•
	16	<b>Krups</b> Savoy EC314050	69	\$80	↓	↑	↑	9	•	•	•
	17	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> BVMC-DMX85 Hot Shot Station	69	\$70	↓	↑	↑	10	•		•
	18	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> BVMC-SJX33GT	68	\$30	↓	↑	↑	10	•		•
	19	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> DW13	68	\$20	↑	↑	↑	10			
	20	<b>Hamilton Beach</b> The Scoop 2-Way Brewer 49980Z	68	\$80	↓	↑	↑	9	•	•	•
	21	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> BVMC-PJX23 (Target exclusive)	67	\$30	↓	↑	↑	9	•		•
	22	<b>Zojirushi</b> Fresh Brew Plus EC-YSC100	67	\$160	↑	↑	↓	9	•		
	23	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> Optimal Brew BVMC-PSTX91	66	\$70	↑	↓	↓	7	•		
	24	<b>Hamilton Beach</b> 46201	66	\$50	↓	↑	↓	9	•	•	•
	25	<b>Bella</b> Dots Collection 12-cup	65	\$42	↑	↑	↑	9			
	26	<b>Cuisinart</b> Coffee Plus CHW-12	65	\$80	↓	↑	↑	9	•	•	
	27	<b>Cuisinart</b> Coffee Center SS-15	64	\$200	↓	↑	↑	9	•	•	•
	28	<b>Caso</b> Coffee One 10-Cup 1100 Brewing System 11850	64	\$165	↓	↑	↑	8	•		
	29	<b>Cuisinart</b> Brew Central DCC-1200	64	\$90	↑	↑	↑	8	•	•	

> Online subscribers can go to [CR.org/coffeemakers](https://www.crispcoffee.com/coffeemakers) for complete, up-to-date ratings.

**HOW WE TEST:** We calculate the Overall Score by measuring the temperature of water during the brew cycle, noting how long water remains between 195° and 205° F—the standard set by the Specialty Coffee Association for optimal brewing. Next we assess convenience of the machine and carafe, noting how easy it is to program each model, fill its reservoir, install any filters, and clean up. We also note how easy it is to handle the carafe without dripping or spilling. Brew Time is calculated to the nearest minute using 40 ounces of water on the machine's regular cycle.