

Feeling hot, hot, hot?

Scientists are constantly learning more about cancer – what causes it, how it impacts our body and how to treat or cure it. [One study](#) has looked at a possible link between frequent drinking of hot beverages and an increased risk of esophageal cancer.

So should coffee drinkers worry? Not drastically, but you should always be mindful of what you put in your body, says [Edie Krueger, MD](#), a radiation oncologist at OSF HealthCare.

“The science behind it is that there’s thermal injury to the lining of the esophagus, or the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. The thermal injury causes the cells to become aberrant [not normal, in other words] and grow on their own without any checkpoints. That’s basically what cancer is,” Dr. Krueger says.

So what should people do? Dr. Krueger says if you’re a morning coffee or tea person, that’s fine. But if you drink scalding hot beverages multiple times a day, consider changing habits. Let the drink cool off before taking a swig. The study mentions 65 degrees Celsius (149 degrees Fahrenheit) as a danger zone. That’s about the temperature when you get coffee right out of the pot, Dr. Krueger says. Also, swap the afternoon hot coffee or tea with another drink.

“Things in moderation are fine,” Dr. Krueger says.

Why it’s important

Esophageal cancer is not the most common in America (around 20,000 cases per year, Dr. Krueger says). But she says it’s a “tough cancer to treat,” underscoring the need to know about it and get treatment sooner rather than later.

She says there are two types of esophageal cancer. The most prevalent in America is adenocarcinoma. The other type, squamous cell carcinoma, is the one with a possible link to hot drinks.

“The symptoms, in general, are things like reflux or trouble swallowing - especially trouble swallowing things like bread or tough foods like steak or chicken. Just really hard to get food down,” Dr. Krueger explains.

“Usually, esophageal cancer is treated with what we call trimodality therapy. That’s surgery, chemotherapy and radiation,” she adds.

Avoiding alcohol, smoking and obesity are ways to help prevent esophageal cancer.

Learn more

Read more about [cancer care](#) on the OSF HealthCare website. Cancer care at OSF includes the [OSF Cancer Institute](#) in Peoria, Illinois.