It is no secret that coffee is a major part of the American diet. The average American drinks around three cups a day. Despite the drink's popularity, it has not always upheld the greatest reputation. Rumors of growth stunt have surrounded the popular beverage, but now researchers say the benefits may outweigh the negatives.

"Coffee is a stimulant and one of the things nutritionally is that we can get an increased cognitive awareness," Kevin Pietro, family and consumer sciences assistant professor, said.

Going over the 300 milligram mark could result in dehydration, as caffeine is a diuretic. Those who consume multiple cups of coffee a day should alternate with glasses of water to prevent dehydration.

"Overconsumption of caffeine can cause anxiety, nervousness and digestive problems. For most people, 'moderate coffee consumption' won't cause negative effects," Julie Schumacher, ISU dietetic internship director, said.

Coffee not only comes with caffeine benefits, but nutritional ones, as well.

One of the biggest positive aspects of coffee, according to current research, is that it has antioxidants.

"Antioxidants … act to neutralize free radicals. I always explain it as free radicals being these kids in a candy store, no chaperone, just going crazy, pulling everything off the wall. And this is what a free radical does inside the cell, just causing all this havoc," Pietro said.

Antioxidants can also be found in chocolate, fruits, vegetables and tea. Antioxidants help prevent lipid oxidation, which leads to artery blockage. They also help prevent certain types of cancer.

“The best way [to get these benefits], in my opinion, would just be plain black coffee,” he said. “When we talked about the metabolic increase, to where we use this caffeine, we drink the caffeine and it actually speeds up our metabolism, a little bit, slightly. If you consume 2000 calories it might give you an extra 200 calories to play around with.”

However, drinking a white chocolate mocha frappuccino will eliminate the benefits of speeding up the metabolism, he added.

“In moderation, coffee can be a good thing. It may help reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers, Parkinson’s disease and maybe even Alzheimer’s disease,” Schumacher said.

Coffee also contains some nutrients — including potassium, niacin, vitamin E and magnesium — which helps the body use the hormone insulin, possibly contributing to the diabetes risk reduction findings, she explained.

As new research about coffee is released, experts are finding that the pros outweigh the cons.

“A lot of publications out there … that would come out and say coffee is one of our major antioxidant foods in the American diet. But it really doesn’t have a lot of antioxidants, so it’s kind of a sad statement because we’re not consuming enough whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables,” Pietro said.