Coffee and Cannabis May Protect the Liver in Those With Both HIV and HCV

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Two new studies on patients coinfected with HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) suggest that drinking coffee and using cannabis daily may help protect the liver from damage, according to a recent press release from INSERM, the Institut national de la santé et de la recherche medicale.

Specifically, the two studies, which were presented last week during the 9th Annual Conference on HIV Science (IAS 2017) in Paris, suggest that individuals who drink at least three cups of coffee a day have a lower risk of liver fibrosis. The study also found a lower risk of hepatic steatosis (or fatty liver) among daily cannabis users coinfected with the viruses.

Each study was conducted as part of the ANRS CO13 HEPAVIH cohort, which includes 1,850 HIV/HCV coinfected individuals who have been followed since 2005 in an effort to better understand coinfection and shed light on the interactions between the two viruses and their treatments. Thus far, infectious disease experts say the cohort has generated one of the richest data sets on HIV/HCV coinfection and their management in the new era of direct-acting antivirals to date.

For the first study, the ANRS HEPAVIH team studied the interactions between coffee intake and alcohol consumption and their effects on liver fibrosis, or stiffening, among 1,019 people in the cohort. Ultimately, they found a 57 percent reduction in the risk of advanced fibrosis in those who drink at least three cups of coffee a day. This lowered fibrosis risk was observed independently of how much alcohol they consumed, as well as after taking into account other health factors (such as age, body mass index, HIV and hepatitis C treatment status, CD4 count and more).

The second study, which studied the impact of hepatic steatosis (the abnormal presence of fat in the liver) in 838 individuals in the cohort, found a similar protective effect from daily cannabis consumption. Findings showed that among the 14 percent of study subjects who reported using cannabis every day, there was a 40 percent reduction in the risk of steatosis, which was not found among those who used the drug less frequently.

Researchers ultimately concluded that further studies are needed to uncover the interactions between dietary habits, the consumption of psychoactive substances and liver disease progression. They stressed that the preliminary findings should not be used to recommend the use of any substance for HIV/HCV-coinfected patients but stated that it will certainly be useful for

doctors to take into account their patients’ consumption behaviors when making clinical evaluations.

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