

Coffee scores highest for antioxidants in diet

study: But nutritionist cautions that combination of vitamins, minerals likely more important

WASHINGTON — When the Ink Spots sang "I love the java jive and it loves me" in 1940, they could not have known how right they were.

Coffee not only helps clear the mind and perk up the energy, it also provides more healthful antioxidants than any other food or beverage in the American diet, according to a study released yesterday.

Of course, too much coffee can make people jittery and even raise cholesterol levels, so food experts stress moderation.

"The point is, people are getting the most antioxidants from beverages, as opposed to what you might think," said Joe Vinson, author of this study and a chemistry professor at the University of Scranton, in Pennsylvania.

Antioxidants, which are thought to help battle cancer and provide other health benefits, are abundant in grains, beans and many other fruits and vegetables.

Vinson's team analyzed the antioxidant content of 100 different food

items, then used Agriculture Department data on typical food consumption patterns to calculate how much antioxidant each food contributes to a person's diet.

They concluded that the average adult consumes 1,299 milligrams of antioxidants daily from coffee. The closest competitor was tea at 294 milligrams. Rounding out the top five sources were bananas, 76 milligrams; dry beans, 72 milligrams; and corn, 48 milligrams.

The typical adult American drinks

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1.64 cups of coffee daily.

His findings were released at the annual convention of the American

Chemical Society in Washington.

Bonnie Liebman, nutrition director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, cautioned that while many people have faith that antioxidants will reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease, the evidence has not always panned out. Most experts are looking beyond antioxidants to the combination of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients in specific foods, she said.

— Associated Press