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FEB 1 1983

## Good News, Bad News About Coffee

A LOT of us might have a hard time starting the day without our morning cup of coffee. Now coffee may be having a hard time, too.

First, Readers Digest published a summary of "good news and bad news" about coffee. Then the Foreign Agricultural Service of USDA issued a circular of coffee data.

It was not until The Wall Street Journal reported that there is a world surplus of coffee that action behind the scenes became apparent. Exporting countries have been dumping large amounts on the markets below prices agreed upon by the International Coffee Organization and smugglers are said to be making big money bypassing import duties. Sometimes smuggled coffee bean sacks are disguised as wheat or corn.

The Readers Digest article focused on possible health hazards of coffee. You could find support for your attitude whether you are a coffee drinker or not.

It reports that Americans drink 2.5 billion pounds of coffee annually, with eight of 10 adults consuming

3.5 cups daily, and that 50 percent of the regular drinkers are "hooked" to some degree.

Whether coffee drinking hurts you depends upon how it affects you and how much you drink. Some people get nervous and have shortness of breath after a couple of cups and others may show little reaction. To get a lethal dose of caffeine you would have to drink more than 100 cups within a few minutes, an unlikely occurrence.

Heavy doses of caffeine can alter heart rhythms but some scientists think coffee drinkers are more likely to survive a heart attack than non-drinkers because caffeine acts as a mild stimulant.

The Foreign Agricultural Service circular reports that per capita consumption of coffee has declined 40 percent since 1962, dropping from 3.12 cups per person daily to 1.90 cups per day.

Coffee still is America's favorite beverage but only 56 percent of the people drink it compared to 75 percent two decades ago. Soft drinks have moved ahead of milk for sec-

ond place. Tea and fruit or vegetable juices are coming up in popularity, too.

A couple of years ago FDA toxicologists trying to find a relation between caffeine and birth defects fed pregnant rats caffeine doses equivalent to a woman drinking from three to 60 cups of coffee a day. The experiments apparently did not establish a connection.

Other studies brought forth contradictory opinions as to whether coffee, like other foods and drugs, might be banned on suspicion as a potential cause of cancer. Proof still is lacking.

We might not always be aware of it but we may derive as much caffeine from other sources as we do from coffee. Tea, soft drinks, headache remedies and stay-awake pills also may contain sizable amounts of caffeine, but somewhat less than a cup of coffee.

You still can get a good nickel cup of coffee at most cafes, although you may have to pay 50 cents or more for service, sugar and cream, and rental on the cup and saucer.