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FYI: Your Coffee Has Way More Cockroaches in It Than You Think – and That's OK

The FDA has set an 'acceptable' level of bug parts in your ground beans.

By **Stacey Leasca** | Published on July 5, 2024

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Americans drink a lot of coffee every year. Like, *a lot*.

As in, we drink up to [146 billion cups per year](#), a lot. And with that, we're probably sipping on a few cockroach legs here and there, too. And you know what? That's OK, at least according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Specifically, the issue is with pre-ground coffee, which accounts for about [75% of coffee sales](#) in the United States. As [Dr. Douglas Emlen](#), an entomologist and professor, shared with [NPR](#) in a 2009 interview, he learned this the hard way from a fellow professor who happened to be allergic to cockroaches that the tiny critter ends up getting ground into the beans more often than people think.

“... He found out the hard way from teaching entomology year after year after year, handling cockroaches – people used cockroaches as the lab rat for entomology labs – he got really badly allergic to them. So, he couldn’t even touch cockroaches without getting an allergic reaction. And because of that, he couldn’t drink pre-ground coffee,” Emlen shared. “And it turned out that pre-ground, you know, the big bulk coffee in a tin, is all processed from these huge stockpiles of coffee.”

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In fact, this is such a common occurrence that the FDA has an “acceptable” level of bug parts in ground coffee and other foods. For coffee, it sits between 4–6%.

As the [FDA’s Food Defect Levels Handbook](#) states, there is an acceptable level of the “presence of any live or dead life cycle stages of insects in a host product (e.g., weevils in pecans, fly eggs and maggots in tomato products); or evidence of their presence (i.e., excreta, cast skins, chewed product residues, urine, etc.); or the establishment of an active breeding population, (e.g., rodents in a grain silo).”

[CNN additionally noted](#), the FDA also regulates an average of 10 milligrams of “insect parts” per pound in your coffee as a little added touch.

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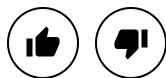
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But it's important to note that this is all just part of the game with any foods you eat – including fruit flies in produce, mold in packaged goods, and insect eggs in juice. It's also critical to understand that these levels are set to ensure testing has a marker to measure our food by and that the FDA still expects companies to do all they can to ensure the cleanest products possible.

“It is incorrect to assume that because the FDA has an established defect action level for a food commodity, the food manufacturer need only stay just below that level. The defect levels do not represent an average of the defects that occur in any of the products – the averages are actually much lower,” the FDA wrote on its site. “The levels represent limits at which FDA will regard the food product 'adulterated'; and subject to enforcement action under Section 402(a)(3) of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act.”

While it's unpleasant, it's not unsafe (unless you have an allergy). And if you're really concerned about your next latte, you can always do as the professor does and head to a shop that will grind its beans right in front of you to take home. (Or buy one of these fantastic [at-home grinders](#) and take matters into your own hands.)

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