

Facts About:

Caffeine

What is Caffeine?

Many people don't realize that caffeine is a drug. It is a *stimulant* that can be found in many pain relievers and cold medications as well as in foods and beverages. About nine out of ten North Americans consume caffeine, mainly in coffee and tea, but also in cola (soda) drinks and chocolate. Here are some commonly used products that contain caffeine:

- Coffee (1 cup) – 40-180 mg,
- Decaffeinated Coffee (1 cup) – 2-5 mg,
- Tea (1 cup) – 10-110 mg,
- Stimulants (1 tablet) – 100-250 mg,
- Painkillers (1 tablet) – 30-100 mg,
- Cola drinks (12 oz/355 ml) – 30-60 mg,
- Dark Chocolate (2 oz/56 g) – 40-50mg,
- Milk Chocolate (2 oz/56 g) – 3-20 mg,

Short-Term Effects

Less than 200 mg of caffeine (1 or 2 cups of coffee) can make you more alert and less tired. It can also increase your ability to do physical work and improve your thinking. Small amounts of caffeine can also cause an increase in blood pressure and urination. Larger amounts (600 mg or more) can make you feel *irritable*, *restless* and *nervous*. You may also experience tremors, insomnia and rapid, irregular heartbeat. When taken before bed, caffeine may interfere with your sleep.

Drinking coffee or tea during or after meals decreases iron absorption. If you need to take iron, you should consider avoiding caffeine at mealtimes. People who suffer from panic attacks should avoid caffeine in large amounts, as it can trigger nervousness and anxiety.

Death from a caffeine overdose is very rare. You would have to inject at least 3.9 g of caffeine or swallow about 10 g. However, much lower doses of caffeine can cause death in children. Caffeine can be useful in treating some types of headaches, including migraines. Your doctor can tell you if caffeine would be a good way for you to get rid of a headache. Caffeine should not be used for the purpose of dieting, as it will not suppress your appetite. *Caffeine does not help people who are drunk to sober up.*

Long-Term Effects

Daily use of low to moderate amounts of caffeine (1 to 3 cups of coffee) by healthy adults does not appear to cause any bad effects. Regular use of more than 600 mg may have short-term effects such as those listed above or long-term effects such as chronic insomnia, constant anxiety and depression, and stomach upset.

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Caffeine and Pregnancy

There is some evidence that consumption of more than 300 mg of caffeine (i.e., about 2 to 3 cups of coffee) in a day is associated with miscarriages and low birth weight babies. Women should consider limiting or eliminating caffeine intake while pregnant.

Caffeine and Addiction

As your body gets used to caffeine, it needs more and more of it to get the same effect. This is called *tolerance*. As the amount of caffeine increases, so does the risk of side effects. You can become *mildly dependent* on caffeine from regularly consuming 350 mg (about 2 to 4 cups of coffee). If you suddenly stop consuming caffeine you may experience withdrawal symptoms such as: headaches and sleep problems. You may also feel irritable, tired and depressed. Withdrawal symptoms begin 12 to 24 hours after you stop consuming caffeine. Most symptoms will pass within a few days.

Living without Caffeine

If you are a regular coffee or cola drinker, it is a good idea to *quit completely for a couple of weeks* at least *once or twice per year*. You may want to seriously consider this, even though caffeine in moderation is not generally considered harmful. Why? To give your body a chance to find a “normal” level of brain chemicals (*homeostasis*) without any kind of drug in your system. If you try to quit and are having a hard time—you might actually be addicted to caffeine. If you think this might be the case, keep trying to cut down having less caffeine each day until you have quit, and make sure you get plenty of sleep and proper nutrition.

The choice is yours – choose to live free from addictions!