

Caffeine

Caffeine is one of the most comprehensively studied ingredients in the food supply. We know a lot about caffeine and it has been consumed safely for centuries. Caffeine exists in our diet from a variety of sources - primarily coffee, tea, chocolate, cola drinks, and both prescription and nonprescription drugs. While much is known about caffeine, many questions and misperceptions still exist; these facts and resources can help to set the story straight.

What are the effects of caffeine?

Caffeine is a mild stimulant to the central nervous system. It is not addictive, though it can be habit forming. When caffeine intake is stopped abruptly, some individuals may experience headache, fatigue or drowsiness. Age and body size can make a difference in effect. A child or a smaller person may feel caffeine's effects more strongly than an adult or a heavier, taller person. A cup of strongly brewed coffee or tea has more caffeine than a weakly brewed cup.

How much caffeine is "safe?"

Moderation is the key. Most experts agree that 300 mg. of caffeine (about the amount contained in 3 cups of coffee) is a moderate intake. People who have certain health problems need to check with their doctor as they consider their caffeine intake. At this time, there is NO evidence that caffeine intake is associated with heart disease, hypertension, osteoporosis or high cholesterol. Because research is ongoing, recommendations about caffeine in the presence of these conditions seems conflicting. Talk with your doctor for guidance about your consumption. Some people are more sensitive to caffeine's effects than others and may feel effects at smaller doses. Pregnancy and aging may affect one's sensitivity to caffeine. There is no evidence that caffeine in beverage form is dehydrating. Its diuretic effects are usually compensated for by the beverage's fluid content. If you ingest caffeine from sports supplements or from prescription drugs or over-the-counter sources be sure to drink adequate fluid to rehydrate yourself from caffeine's mild diuretic action.

Will caffeine help me study?

Caffeine may help you stay awake and be alert to study, but it will not improve your performance on an exam the next day if you have not gotten enough rest or are exhausted from an all-nighter.

How can I energize?

Instead of reaching for another soda or coffee, try these non-caffeinated strategies to maintain good energy levels:

- Get a good night's sleep. If you are tired during the day, take a short nap.
- Take a brisk, 10-minute walk.
- Eat regular, healthful meals. Use www.MyPyramid.gov to build your meals. Foods high in saturated fat and alcohol can make you feel "draggy."
- Try not to skip or delay meals. Avoid eating very large meals - digesting a large meal can make you want a nap.

Can I safely have caffeine if I am pregnant or if I am considering pregnancy?

At this time, moderate caffeine intake is not believed to affect either fertility or the health of a mother or fetus. Talk with your doctor - research is always in progress. Avoid high consumption. Try to limit coffee to three cups per day or less. Caffeine is passed into breast milk and little data exists about the effects on infants. Try to avoid this while breastfeeding.

I get my caffeine from coffee and/or herbal supplements – and I would like to lose weight. Is it safe to take an herbal supplement to help me lose weight or to stay awake?

Herbal supplements for weight loss often contain high levels of caffeine and/or guarana or ephedra (ma huang) - other nervous system stimulants. Using weight loss supplements containing ephedra have been associated with illness and death. For additional ephedra information visit this hyperlink: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-ephed.html>.

Taking diet supplements containing these ingredients, and maintaining your usual caffeine intake can push you past the recommended moderate level of caffeine intake. Remember the "moderate" caffeine limit is 300 mg/day - and realize that herbal stimulants can be very dangerous.

If your caffeine comes from pills vs. drinks, be sure to keep your fluid intake high to address the moderate dehydrating effects of caffeine.

How can I quit or reduce my caffeine consumption?

Cut back gradually. Eliminate a cup or glassful a day rather than going "cold turkey."

- Keep a log to see how much caffeine you consume. Remember to count medications and supplements. Experiment with your intake to see how you feel both physically and psychologically
- Limit your intake to 200-300 mg of caffeine per day.
- Substitute herbal tea, hot or cold cider or decaf coffee for caffeinated drinks.
- Be active or be still - run, walk, bike ride, swim, do yoga or meditate.
- Eat regular meals
- Stop smoking - caffeine and cigarettes often go together.
- Ask others in your house or office to decrease their caffeine with you. There is strength in numbers.
- Remember that coffee does NOT help you to sober up after drinking alcohol.

Moderation is the key to caffeine intake. When your caffeine intake is not moderate, be prepared to feel nervous and have poor sleep patterns. Caffeine's effects vary according to the individual - some people feel very little effect and some people feel frazzled by the smell of a coffee bean.

The amount of caffeine in some common foods and beverages is as follows:

- Coffee, brewed - .40 to 180 mg. per cup
- Coffee, decaffeinated - 2 to 5 mg. per cup
- Tea, brewed imported - 25 to 110 mg. per cup
- Cocoa - 2-20 mg. per cup
- Chocolate - bittersweet - 5-35 mg. per ounce
- Cola and other soft drinks, containing caffeine - 36 to 90 mg. per 12 ounces
- Cola and other soft drinks, decaffeinated - 0 mg. per 12 ounces
- Coffee, instant - 30 to 120 mg. per cup
- Tea, brewed American - 20 to 90 mg. per cup
- Tea, instant - 25-50 mg. per cup
- Chocolate, milk - 2-7 mg. per ounce

Some common brands of medications that contain caffeine are:

- Caffeine Caplets
- Enerjets
- NoDoz Maximum Strength Caplets
- Vivarin

For additional information on caffeine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus> (click on "drugs & supplements," then "caffeine")

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>