

Nutrition News

Information for Senior Citizens

*Developed by Colorado State University Extension
Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition*

Caffeine, Coffee, and Your Health

With all the bad publicity about coffee and caffeine these days, many are left wondering, "How much coffee should I drink?" Does being healthy mean that you have to pass on coffee? No. Coffee in moderation (five or less cups a day) is all right. This newsletter will address some of the questions and controversies surrounding coffee and caffeine.

Caffeine is a natural stimulant found in many plants, including coffee, tea, and the cocoa bean. It is also found in a number of drugs, including pain relievers. However, the majority of caffeine in this country is obtained from coffee.

Caffeine can have both positive and negative effects on your body. It has been shown to enhance learning and memory.

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Some athletes use caffeine to enhance performance, and coffee has been shown to open the bronchial passages.

There is a downside, however. Some of the negative effects of caffeine include: stomach upset, nervousness, irritability, headaches, and diarrhea. Caffeine can also make it more difficult to fall sleep at night.

The effects of caffeine are different for every person depending upon the amount of caffeine taken at one time. Many people develop a tolerance to caffeine rather quickly. Some can become dependent on caffeine on just 2½ cups of coffee a day. Caffeine-dependent people who quit may have headaches for about a week.



Did you know . . .

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- ❖ **Tea was discovered by Chinese Emperor Shen-Nung when tea leaves blew into his drink.**
 - ❖ **Coffee originated near the Red Sea and spread throughout the Arab world before coming to Europe.**
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Caffeine, Coffee and Your Heart

Does caffeine trigger heart attacks? According to most studies over the past two decades, there is little difference in heart disease-related deaths among heavy coffee drinkers vs. nondrinkers. Also, coffee does not appear to raise blood-cholesterol as previously thought. The amount of caffeine in two cups of coffee may slightly increase blood pressure one hour after intake.

Lastly, the amount of caffeine in nine or more cups of coffee has been shown to disrupt normal heart rhythm in sensitive people.



Caffeine, Coffee and Cancer

In the past three decades, the relationship between coffee and cancer risk has been carefully studied. There appears to be no link to coffee and breast cancer, large bowel cancer, cancer of the stomach, and cancers of the mouth, pharynx, and esophagus. In regards to cancer of the pancreas and the ovary, there may be a very slight risk if you drink a large amount of coffee (nine cups of a day).

Caffeine, Coffee and Pregnancy

If you have pregnant children or grandchildren, you may have questions about whether or not caffeine can cause complications with pregnancy. Studies have shown that some of the caffeine may reach the unborn baby. Therefore, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advise pregnant women to limit or eliminate caffeine from their diet. Moms-to-be should keep coffee drinking to a minimum.

Caffeine, Coffee and Bones

Too much caffeine may increase bone loss in older women. Moderate caffeine intake to less than 3 cups of coffee a day, and be sure to get adequate calcium. (See Vol. 1, issue 3.)

Caffeine, Coffee and Medications

If you take medications, both prescribed and over-the-counter, it is important that you ask your doctor if caffeine interacts with the actions of your medication. Listed below are some common interactions between medications and caffeine.

- Decreased effectiveness of anti-arrhythmic drugs.
- Increased absorption of these drugs:
 - * Aspirin (Alka-Seltzer[®], Anacin[®], Bayer[®] Aspirin, and Bufferin[®])
 - * Ergotamine (Cafergot[®])
- Increased activity of some asthma medications.
- Caffeine may cause hypertension or abnormal heart rhythms with these drugs:
 - * Monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors (Marplan, Nardil, Parnate)
 - * Selegiline (Eldepryl[®])

These are just a few of the drugs whose actions are affected by caffeine. Talk to your doctor for information about your specific medications.



Recommendations

Like everything else, moderation is the key. It is recommended to keep coffee drinking to three cups or less per day. If you don't want the caffeine, you can always choose decaffeinated.

Sources: *Nutrition Today*, Jan-Feb. 2002; *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Nov. 2001.

Questions and Answers



Q: How is decaffeinated coffee made?

A: There are several ways in which caffeine is removed. In one method, caffeine is removed by using a solvent. In another method, beans are soaked in water, which dissolves the caffeine.

Q: How much caffeine is there in a cup of coffee?

A: The amount of caffeine in coffee and tea varies depending on the processing, preparation, and product. For example, the longer you steep a tea bag, the more caffeine will end up in your cup. There is a whole array of products if you want to watch your caffeine intake, such as “decaffeinated” and “reduced-caffeine instants.” If in doubt, assume the higher end of the caffeine range. As Forrest Gump might say, “Coffee is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get.”

Q: Is it true that tea helps to fight cancer?

A: It appears that drinking green or black tea may help to reduce your cancer risk. Animal studies showed that drinking green tea reduced the risk for certain cancers. This does not mean that we should start drinking several cups of tea a day. If you like the taste, then enjoy tea in moderation.

Green teas are the preferred drink in Japan and China - the leaves are picked and dried. Black teas are picked, crushed, and slightly fermented and are the preferred drink in India and the U.K. Both teas contain beneficial antioxidants.

Sources of Caffeine

Item	Caffeine (mg)
Coffee (1 cup)	
drip	175-250
perk	150-200
instant	75-169
decaf	2-10
reduced-caffeine	20-57
Tea (1 cup)	35-110
Chocolate (1 oz)	
baking chocolate	25-35
milk chocolate	5-15
Hot Cocoa (1 pkg)	5-10
Soft drinks (12 oz)	
Mountain Dew	54
Coca-Cola (diet, reg)	46
Dr. Pepper	41
Pepsi-Cola (diet, reg)	35
Over-the-counter drugs (per tablet)	
Vivarin® tablet	200
No Doz® tablet	100
Excedrin®	65
Anacin®	32

Sources: *Consumer Reports*, October, 1994; adapted from a handout from Poudre Valley Hospital, Fort Collins, CO.

Food Stamps



Q: What's the purpose of Food Stamps?

A: The food stamp program was designed to provide extra food purchasing power to people with limited resources. The program is available to all eligible persons, regardless of race, color, creed, sex, age, national origin, political beliefs, or handicaps. Food stamps are coupons issued by the Federal government, which are redeemed for food. The program is managed locally by a county agency.

Q: Who is eligible to receive food stamps?

A: Your eligibility for food stamps depends on the number of people in your household, the income of each member, and the value of the personal possessions that they own. The program is only for people with limited resources. Contact your local social security office for further questions regarding eligibility.

Q: How can you apply for food stamps?

A: Here are the steps you need to take:

1. Go to the social security office or local Food Stamp office and get a Food Stamp application form. Ask them for help if you need it.
2. Fill out the application and take it to the local Food Stamp office or present it to a state eligibility worker if one is employed at the Social Security office.
3. You will have to bring:
 - Some form of identification that shows your name and address.
 - Proof of the Social Security number for you and other numbers of your household.
 - Proof of earnings or other income, such as Social Security benefits or a pension, for each household member.
 - Medical bills for those ages 60 or over or for those getting Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security disability benefits.
 - Proof of shelter costs, such as rent or mortgage, heating and/or cooling costs, taxes and insurance.

If you have further questions, call the national Food Stamp office at 1-800-221-5689 and ask for your state's toll-free number.

