

Just the Facts... Caffeine!



Ever felt the buzz of a strong cup of coffee or an “energy” drink? You’re not alone. Many college students use caffeine, a mild central nervous system stimulant, to stay awake late into the night or prevent fatigue in the morning. Curious if caffeine might be hurting your health? Read on to learn more about this popular drug.

Sources. Caffeine is a naturally occurring chemical found in more than 60 plants. The most popular caffeine-containing foods are coffee, tea, chocolate, and cola drinks. More than 1,000 medications contain caffeine.

Diuretic. Caffeine acts as a mild diuretic, which increases water loss through urination. However, caffeinated beverages won’t cause dehydration because the fluid in the beverage balances the loss.

Caffeine and Alcohol. Contrary to popular belief, caffeine does not help someone “sober up” after a night of drinking. (Neither do cold showers or long walks!)

Sensitivity. Some people are more sensitive to caffeine than others, and their definition of “excessive” caffeine intake is different from others’. Some signs of excessive caffeine intake include insomnia, anxiety, and jitters. Caffeine is excreted within 3-4 hours of intake, so side effects should subside after this time.

Tolerance. Body weight, frequency of intake, anxiety, age, and physical condition determine a person’s tolerance to caffeine. The more tolerant a person is, the more caffeine they can consume before feeling the effects.

Addiction? Caffeine is not addictive, but it can be habit-forming. If you decide it’s time to cut back on the caffeine, do so gradually. Cutting back on caffeine too quickly can cause headaches, drowsiness, and decreased concentration. Try replacing your daily caffeine drinks with decaf coffee (try mixing ½ decaf with ½ regular coffee to get started), herbal tea, decaf tea, or even water.

Osteoporosis. Moderate amounts of caffeine do not increase the risk for osteoporosis. Though caffeine does increase calcium excretion from the body, the amount lost is very small. So, the good news is that you will still retain a significant amount of calcium from your morning latte!

Questions? A registered dietitian can answer your questions or give you more tips for cutting back on caffeine. Call 243-6325 for information.

