

Health Tip: Caffeine

If you're like most adults, caffeine is a part of your daily routine, whether it's a vanilla latte with 150 mg of caffeine or a diet soda with 45 mg, or both. In the US, more than 80% of adults consume caffeine in coffee, tea, energy drinks, soda and other forms on a daily basis. Caffeine stimulates the central nervous system, alleviating fatigue, increasing wakefulness and elevating mood. These effects generally last about six hours.

Caffeine is generally thought to be safe for adults in moderate amounts, that is, 200–300 mg a day or about the amount in two 5 ounce cups of brewed coffee. Teens should stay under 100 mg a day, and younger kids less. Higher doses of caffeine can have several effects, such as anxiety, dizziness, headaches, and the jitters. Caffeine can interfere with normal sleep, impact calcium absorption which can lead to bone loss, aggravate certain heart problems and increase blood pressure.

Your sensitivity to caffeine may be determined in part by how much caffeine you're used to drinking. Other factors may include body mass, age, smoking habits, drug or hormone use, stress and health conditions such as anxiety disorders. Research suggests that men are more susceptible to the effects of caffeine than are women.

Take a closer look at how much caffeine you get in a typical day. Read labels carefully. Some foods, like chocolate, do not list caffeine. Consuming as little as 100 mg of caffeine a day can lead a person to become "dependent" on the stimulant. If caffeine seems to have a negative impact on you and/or you're taking in too much caffeine, consider cutting back.

Tips for reducing caffeine in your diet:

- **Cut back gradually.** Substitute one drink per week with a caffeine-free alternative, or drink a smaller cup of coffee each day, until you've gotten below the 100 mg mark. Cutting back slowly will help lessen possible withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches or irritability.
- **Get adequate sleep.** As you reduce the amount of caffeine you consume, you may find yourself feeling tired. With restful sleep, your energy levels will return to normal in a few days.
- **Try decaf.** If you find yourself craving the morning coffee shop ritual, switch to decaffeinated beverages which look and taste the same as their caffeinated counterparts. Start off with a half regular and half decaf mix to cut back on caffeine gradually.
- **Look for caffeine-free pain relievers.** Some over-the-counter pain relievers contain as much as 130 mg of caffeine in one dose.
- **Eat healthy.** Meals that contain small amounts of healthy fats, along with protein and complex carbohydrates, are the foundation for an energizing diet. Maintain a normal blood sugar by eating every few hours. Carry high energy snacks, like low-fat cheese and whole-grain crackers, whole fruit and nuts or a low-fat granola bar. Other smart choices include yogurt, oatmeal, blueberries, beans, mango, spinach, salmon, and sweet potatoes.

Many caffeinated beverages contain sugar to sweeten caffeine's bitter taste, but too much sugar can result in weight gain. Cutting back on these drinks may support your weight loss efforts.

Pregnant and nursing women should limit their use of caffeine. Some medications and supplements may interact with caffeine. Talk with your health care provider to see if caffeine is safe for you.

Sources: U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Mayo Clinic, National Institutes for Health, LifeWork Strategies, Inc and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.