



Coffee: healthy or harmful?

The Healthy aspect:



Caffeinated coffee has had a bad rap. But I feel that I have to defend it. Everywhere I go people are startled and disappointed that I order coffee, and don't add "decaffeinated". I enjoy my coffee and intend to continue doing so, guilt-free. I will tell you why.

Caffeinated drinks are not diuretics

Beverages, such as coffee and tea, are fluids. I repeat the statement I have made before; caffeine-containing drinks are not diuretics. Some people believe that if you drink 12 ounces of coffee, you lose 12 ounces of water. That is not so. Coffee can replace water when you're thirsty, because it is 99% water.

A recent study showed that if you drink 12 ounces of weak coffee containing 31 mg caffeine (usual caffeine content would be 120 mg caffeine), you would lose one more ounce of urine than normal. That sounds good enough for me. Of course, the more fluids you drink, caffeinated or not, the more you will "have to go." Test yourself with decaf coffee, you may find you "have to go" just as often.

Caffeine as a stimulant

Caffeine:

- Is absorbed in the stomach and small intestine. That is why you can feel its effects as soon as 15 minutes after you drink coffee
- Increases dopamine levels, a neurotransmitter in the brain that activates the pleasure centre
- Can help you stay alert when you work or study
- Intake is a habit, not an addiction. You may think you've become "addicted" to coffee, in the same way you're "addicted" to running or watching your favourite television show.
- Does not build up in the body like some drugs. It is excreted within a few hours of consuming.
- Is associated with fewer suicides. Coffee may be good for life. A major study has found fewer suicides among coffee drinkers than those who abstained from the hot black brew.
- Caffeine can suppress appetite but its appetite-suppressant effect doesn't last long enough to lead to significant weight loss.

How much caffeine/coffee?

Moderate caffeine consumption is considered to be 300 milligrams (mg) per day, which is equal to four cups of coffee. Here's a list of caffeine-containing drinks and their caffeine content to help you calculate your daily caffeine intake. Just make sure you don't overdo it.

Item	Milligrams of Caffeine
Coffee (8 oz): Brewed, instant	60 - 120
Decaffeinated	2 - 4
Espresso (1 oz)	40
Tea (8 oz): Hot	30 - 60
: Iced	10 - 40
Pop (8 oz)	20 - 30
Chocolate milk (8 oz)	2 - 6
Chocolate (1 oz)	5 - 25

The Harmful aspect:

Is there a possible harm to consuming too much caffeine-containing coffee? Of course! Like all beverages and foods, too much of any one can cause harm.

The most common effect that can be negative is the stimulating effect of the caffeine in coffee. If you drink coffee at night, it could affect your sleep. As coffee is the main source of caffeine in the diet, I will discuss both.

Children

Caffeine-type beverages are not recommended for kids. It can make them jittery and interfere with their sleep. It is preferable for children to drink milk. Research shows no difference in the way children and adults handle caffeine and caffeine-containing foods and beverages. Low caffeine intake doesn't have an effect on hyperactivity.

Pregnant women

- Some studies have shown a reduced chance of becoming pregnant with a high caffeine intake, others not.
- Caffeine intake may increase the risk of early spontaneous abortion in some pregnant women. In a Swedish study, women who had a caffeine intake of more than 500mg/day had twice as many spontaneous abortions compared to those with a caffeine intake of less than 100 mg/day.
- The recommendation is that pregnant women should avoid or lower caffeine intake - with a maximum of one cup of coffee a day.

Caffeine and disease

- Fibrocystic breast disease - caffeine may aggravate the condition. With breast cancer, no relationship has been found, not even where women have lumps in their breasts.
- Osteoporosis - way down in the list as a risk factor for decreasing your calcium levels. Be sure to add plenty of milk to your coffee, or even better, drink a skinny latte.
- Heart disease or high blood pressure - limit or avoid caffeine intake until you speak to your physician, although a recent Finnish study found that coffee drinking does not appear to increase risk of coronary heart disease or death.

Why the headache with caffeine withdrawal?

Many people have reported irritability, nervousness, sleepiness, depression and extreme headaches within a day of their last dose of caffeine. These symptoms can last three days. Why?

This is the reason:

- Caffeine belongs to the same chemical group as adenosine, a nerve carrier in the brain.
- When you consume caffeine, the nerve cell thinks it is adenosine. Caffeine therefore binds to the adenosine receptor.
- Suddenly reducing caffeine intake makes the body oversensitive to adenosine.
- Blood vessels in the brain dilate.
- This causes an excess of blood in the head and the result is a quick drop in blood pressure.
- Thus, the famous headache.

Again the moderation message - don't fear coffee. Enjoy caffeine-containing foods and beverages, but **don't** abuse them.