

CAFFEINE: FRIEND OR FOE?

Caffeine is often victim to many misconceptions. Some people see caffeine as a negative addictive substance, while others perceive it as a necessary part of their day. As in most cases, there is no black and white when it comes to caffeine. Though it can have negative effects like causing insomnia if consumed late in the day, it can also be very useful. For example, it can be found in most over-the-counter painkillers, as it is itself a mild painkiller and helps other painkillers work more efficiently.

Here are few interesting facts about caffeine-

- **It is a stimulant that can cause a mild physical addiction.** This means that if you stop ingesting it abruptly, you may experience mild symptoms like headaches, irritability, and fatigue. Yet, it is hardly considered an addictive substance compared to other narcotics. In fact, giving up caffeine can have similar side effects to giving up candy or sweets.
- **Caffeine is absorbed quickly by the liver, but also leaves your body relatively quickly.** Within 7-10 hours of consuming caffeine, 75% of it is gone. Though it can cause insomnia when consumed late in the day, a safe rule is to not consume caffeine any later than 6 hours before you plan to go to bed.
- **Moderate amounts of caffeine (like 3 cups of coffee per day) have no harmful effects on most adults.** If you are pregnant or trying to conceive, this should be reduced to 2 cups of coffee per day.
- **Caffeine does not cause dehydration,** any more than water. This is why many sports drink contain caffeine.
- **While not advisable, caffeine in moderation appears to be safe in children.** Caffeine is usually found in soda or sweetened teas, which contain loads of sugar. High sugar intake is linked to childhood obesity which causes many other health risks.
- **Caffeine does not health you sober up.** A recent study of college kids who drive impaired showed that those who consumed coffee before driving were in more accidents than those who only drank alcohol before getting behind the wheel.
- **Caffeine can have some positive effects.** It may be linked to decreases in incidents of Parkinson's, liver disease, colorectal cancer and type 2 diabetes, when consumed in moderation. But more studies are needed to confirm this.
- **Caffeine side effects are more pronounced in men, than women.**



Caffeine, like most drugs, affects different people, differently. Though relatively harmless in moderation in adults, it may produce more serious side effects in people more sensitive to it. As well, some antibiotics and herbal supplements like Echinacea can interfere with the body's absorption of caffeine, resulting in more negative effects like anxiety and upset stomach.

For most people, consumption of caffeine through a cup of coffee or tea is a way of life. There appears to be no reason to eliminate this- unless you feel it affects you or you have trouble sleeping. As well, please remember that moderation is key; 2-3 cups of coffee a day is fine, but once you increase that amount by consuming sodas and chocolate, you may be adversely affected by the excessive caffeine consumed.