

Caffeine: The Latest Buzz

By Loraine Fick



**“Strong coffee, and lots, keeps me awake.
It gives me warmth and an unusual strength.”
– Napoleon Bonaparte**

It can lift your mood and lower your risk of diabetes. Boost endurance and cut the chance of getting some cancers. It can also increase blood pressure and decrease bone density, raise levels of stress hormones and affect quality of sleep. Nine out of 10 Americans regularly consume caffeine, but is this daily dose harmful or healthful? Here are a few facts on each side of the issue so you can decide for yourself.

Caffeine content at a glance

- Brewed coffee (8 oz.) = 40 to 180 mg
- NoDoz, regular strength (1 tablet) = 100 mg
- Cola (12 oz.) = 36 to 90 mg
- Brewed tea (8 oz.) = 20 to 90 mg
- Excedrin (1 tablet) = 65 mg
- Mountain Dew (12 oz.) = 55 mg
- Hot cocoa (6 oz.) = 2 to 8 mg
- Milk chocolate (1 oz.) = 3 to 6 mg
- Decaffeinated coffee (8 oz.) = 3 to 5 mg
- Decaffeinated cola (12 oz.) = 0 mg

Cup Half Empty

Stress. A morning cup or two of a caffeinated drink can heighten stress all day long, and caffeine magnifies stress in general when consumed every day. To complete the circle, stress can increase sensitivity to caffeine.

Addiction. Caffeine is habit forming. To kick the habit for good, taper off slowly to avoid caffeine-withdrawal headaches. And if you get one, don't reach for an Excedrin—one tablet has nearly as much caffeine as a cup of coffee.

Sensitivity. Caffeine tolerance varies from person to person. For some, even a small amount of coffee, tea or cola causes anxiety, restlessness or irritability.

Weird Science

The strangest caffeine delivery system doesn't come in a cup—would you believe caffeinated donuts? Robert Bohannon, a molecular scientist in Durham, N.C., has engineered high-octane pastries with about as much caffeine as a cup of coffee.

Cup Half Full

Antioxidants. Coffee is America's number one source of antioxidants, which help the body fight off heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other diseases. Other caffeine-rich beverages, such as tea and some energy drinks, also contain antioxidants.

Athletic performance. Caffeine's boost is so well documented that the equivalent of three or four cups can get athletes banned from the Olympic Games.

Weight management. Caffeine may suppress the appetite and even increase metabolism. But the effects are mild, and overdoing it to lose weight doesn't work.