

Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

Clarifying the caffeine controversy

Some people find that they just cannot deal with the day until they have had their morning jolt of caffeine. In fact, caffeine is the most popular drug consumed worldwide. Yet we are often warned that it is harmful to our health.

Where do you find caffeine?

Caffeine can be found in common foods such as:

- coffee
- tea
- cola-type drinks
- chocolate



Caffeine can also be found in:

- some medications
- energy drinks*
- diet aids
- chocolate milk



*A hidden source of caffeine:

Guarana is a flavour added to energy drinks and some soft drinks. It contains a caffeine-like substance that has the same stimulating properties as caffeine. Energy drinks made with guarana can have up to **260mg** of this caffeine-like compound in a **500mL** bottle. Check the ingredient list on the label of your energy drink for guarana.

How will caffeine affect me?

Caffeine affects each person differently. The differences depend on how much caffeine you consume, your age, body size, how you process it and your health.

Some people find that they crave foods or drinks with caffeine. This is most likely because of the stimulating effects of caffeine on our bodies.

Caffeine may cause a short-term increase in:

- heart rate
- body temperature
- breathing rate
- amount of urine produced
- blood pressure
- alertness and performance on certain tasks

For some, caffeine consumption may cause headaches, irritability, nervousness and problems sleeping.

Some people may feel no effects after consuming several servings of products containing caffeine. Others may feel stimulating effects after only one serving.

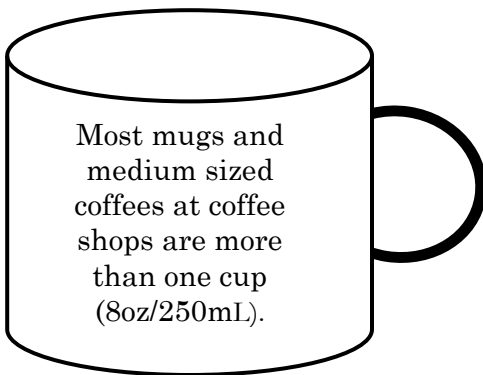
For adults, the effects of caffeine may last for about two hours. After that our body gets rid of all the caffeine and it does not store it for later use.

What is a safe amount of caffeine?

Health Canada advises that moderate caffeine intake is safe. Moderate is no more than **400-450mg** of caffeine each day. This would be about 2 to 2½ cups (16-20oz or 500-625mL) of filter-drip coffee each day.



Coffee lovers beware...



Take a look at the table on the back page for the caffeine content of your favourite food.

Does caffeine affect my health?

Moderate caffeine intake is not a risk factor for diseases such as cancer, heart disease and osteoporosis. If you are consuming more than 400-450mg of caffeine every day though, this intake may be replacing more nutritious beverages needed for healthy living. Two groups at greater risk from caffeine's effects are children and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.



Is caffeine addictive?

Caffeine is not like an addictive drug of abuse, but one can build up a dependence on its effects. This means that when regular caffeine consumption is suddenly stopped, some people may experience symptoms such as headache, fatigue or drowsiness. These effects last only a day or so. To avoid these symptoms, slowly reduce the amount of caffeine you consume.

Can I consume caffeine when I am trying to get pregnant, am pregnant or breastfeeding?

For women who are pregnant or who are planning to become pregnant, their caffeine intake should be no more than **300mg** (or 1½ cups (12 oz/375mL) of filter drip coffee per day).

This small amount of caffeine does not have a harmful effect on fertility or the fetus. Breastfeeding women should be aware that caffeine is found in breastmilk. This may make their baby fussy.



For more information on caffeine and pregnancy or breastfeeding, please refer to the Nutrition Matters fact sheet '**Pregnant or Breastfeeding? Get the Facts on Herbal Teas and Products**'. To obtain a copy of this fact sheet, call Health Connection 1-800-361-5653.

Is caffeine safe for children?



New caffeine guidelines for children suggest that caffeine consumption should be limited.

Evidence suggests that caffeine intakes up to the maximum level listed below are not harmful to children.

These amounts of caffeine will not cause hyperactivity or attention deficit disorders. However since the nervous system (including the brain) continues to develop and mature during childhood, children may be more sensitive to any adverse effects of caffeine.

Children and teens typically consume less caffeine than adults. But, their intake of caffeine from caffeinated soft drinks is on the rise. Parents should encourage children and teens to choose more nutritious beverages such as milk, fruit juice and water in order to limit caffeine intake.

Maximum caffeine intake levels for children

4-6 years	45mg/day
7-8 years	63mg/day
10-12 years	85mg/day

This is how easily a child can reach his/her maximum caffeine intake:

Child's Age	Food portion needed to reach maximum caffeine intake
4-6 years	1 can of cola
7-9 years	1 chocolate brownie plus 1 bottle (473mL) of iced tea plus a chocolate bar, plus 1 cup chocolate milk
10-12 years	1 bottle (473mL) of iced tea plus 1 can of cola plus 2 brownies



Tips for cutting back on coffee

Since coffee is the chief source of caffeine, it is the fastest way to cut back on caffeine. Keep in mind, the amount of caffeine in coffee varies a great deal depending on the type of coffee you drink, how it is prepared, the type of coffee maker and the size of your mug!

- purchase smaller sized coffees
- replace filter-drip with instant coffee
- drink decaffeinated coffee sometimes
- mix half a cup of decaffeinated coffee with half a cup of caffeinated coffee, and then slowly increase the amount of decaffeinated coffee
- Choose a latte for a smaller shot of coffee and the added bonus of lots of milk
- Choose beverages such as milk, juice or water more often.

Caffeine content of common Canadian foods

Remember that a moderate amount of caffeine for adults is no more than 400-450mg.

Coffees	Serving size	Caffeine* (mg)
Coffee (variety of brands)	1 cup** (250 mL)	137
Coffee, roasted and ground (percolated)	1 cup (250 mL)	118
Coffee, roasted and ground (filter drip ⁺)	1 cup (250 mL)	179
Coffee, regular instant (variety of brands)	1 cup (250 mL)	76 – 106
Coffee, decaffeinated brewed (variety of brands)	1 cup (250 mL)	3
Cafe Latte	1 cup (250 mL)	35
Cappuccino	1 cup (250 mL)	69
Espresso	2 oz (60 mL)	70-125
Teas		
Tea (variety of brands)	1 cup (250 mL)	43
Iced Tea (bottled, canned or powder)	1 cup (250 mL)	15
Green Tea	1 cup (250 mL)	30
Herbal Tea	1 cup (250 mL)	0
Tea, decaffeinated	1 cup (250 mL)	0
Please note that mugs and take-out cups are often larger than 250 mL and would therefore contain more caffeine.		
Soft drinks		
Mountain Dew Energy	591 mL (1 bottle)	91
Pepsi/Coke or cola type beverages	355 mL (1 can)	37
Diet Pepsi/Coke or cola type beverage	355 mL (1 can)	50
7-Up, Crush Flavours,	355 mL (1 can)	0
Soft Drinks, decaffeinated	355 mL (1 can)	0
Chocolate products		
Chocolate Milk	1 cup (250 mL)	5-8
Baking Chocolate	28 g	25-58
Hot Chocolate, from vending machine or mix	1 cup (250 mL)	5-9
Chocolate Bar	45g	11-23
Chocolate Brownie (6cm x 6cm)	1.5 oz (42 g)	10
Chocolate Cake (1/12 cake)	2.8 oz (80 g)	6
Ice creams		
Coffee-flavoured Ice Cream	½ cup (125 mL)	21
Chocolate-flavoured Ice Cream	½ cup (125 mL)	2
Yogourt		
Coffee-flavoured Yogourt	175 g	10
Medicine		
Medicine	Check label for the caffeine content.	

*The above values are given as approximations or ranges and values will vary depending on the food manufacturer, brewing method, plant variety and brand.

** 1 cup= 8 fl. oz.

⁺Coffee shops serve filter drip coffee.