CAFFEINE

Caffeine may be the world's most popular drug. It is a white, slightly bitter, crystal-like substance found in coffee, tea, cocoa, and cola. It is also found in some products such as aspirin, nonprescription cough and cold remedies, diet pills, and some street drugs.

Caffeine is a stimulant. Stimulants ("uppers") refer to several groups of drugs that tend to increase alertness and physical activity. Some people use caffeine to counteract the drowsiness or "down" feeling caused by sleeplessness, fatigue or alcohol. This up/down cycle is extremely hard on the body and dangerous.

As with all drugs, the effects vary depending on the amount taken, tolerance, body weight, diet, and the individual. When a person drinks two cups of coffee (15-300 milligrams of caffeine), the effects begin in 15-30 minutes. The person's metabolism, body temperature and blood pressure may increase. Other effects include increase urine production, higher blood sugar levels, hand tremor, a loss of coordination, decreased appetite, and delayed sleep.

In some cases, too much caffeine causes headaches.

Persons with ulcers or stomach ailments should avoid caffeine. Extremely high doses may cause nausea, diarrhea, sleeplessness, trembling, headaches, an irregular heart beat, and nervousness. Poisonous doses of caffeine have occurred occasionally and may result in convulsions and breathing failure. Deaths have been reported through misuse of tablets containing caffeine.

Tolerance to caffeine (the need for a larger dose to get the same effect) may develop with the use of over 500-600 milligrams of caffeine per day (for example, 4-6 cups of coffee). A regular user of caffeine who has developed a tolerance also may have a craving for the drug's effects, particularly to "get going" in the morning. Some researchers have found a withdrawal-like syndrome among people who suddenly stop using caffeine. The symptoms include headache, fatigue, muscle pain, depression, irritability, and mood changes. If you're prone to weekend headaches, examine your weekday caffeine habits. Frequently, weekend headaches are due to caffeine withdrawal. To minimize caffeine withdrawal symptoms, gradually reduce your caffeine intake over a period of several weeks.

CAFFEINE: The Good News

One cannot deny that the coffee break has become a national ritual, and coffee houses are quickly becoming a popular part of American social life. On the medical side, caffeine tends to relax "smooth" muscles, especially bronchial muscles, which is why a cup of black coffee may temporarily help asthmatics who are having trouble breathing. Caffeine may also provide relief from some types of headaches, and this is especially true when caffeine is combined with aspirin or tylenol.

HOW MUCH CAFFEINE??

Chocolaie Milk (8 oz.) 2-7 mg
Chocolate Cake:1 slice 25 mg
Anacin tablet 32 mg
Excedrin tablet 65 mg
NoDoz tablet 100 mg
Vivarin tablet 200 mg

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COFFEE

Coffee is by far the most common source of caffeine in our diets and accounts for over one-half of our total U.S. caffeine consumption. The average cup of coffee contains 100 to 150 milligrams of caffeine. According to folklore, the effects of caffeine in coffee was discovered when a shepherd noticed that his flocks were friskier after eating coffee beans and berries. Coffee was used first as a food and later as a medicine. It became a popular beverage in Arabia when wine was forbidden by Islamic law. Westerners were introduced to coffee in the seventeenth century. Early settlers in our country brought their love of coffee with them. Today millions of Americans enjoy coffee each day.

CAFFEINE AND PREGNANCY

Caffeine use appears to decrease fertility in women trying to become pregnant. Many doctors recommend that pregnant women should avoid caffeine. Caffeine enters the bloodstream and crosses the placenta to the fetus. Caffeine has been linked to lower birth weights and there is evidence that large caffeine intakes may increase the risk of miscarriage. Misuse of caffeine may also lead to miscarriage. Because newborns may also be affected by caffeine through mothers' milk, doctors advise nursing women to cease or minimize caffeine intake.

DID YOU KNOW???

✓ Caffeinated foods and drinks are consumed by an estimated 82-92% of the adult population in North America. Americans consume an average of 211 milligrams daily, about half the average daily intake in England.

✓ The "lift" many people feel when they roll out of bed and sip their first cup of coffee may not result completely from caffeine's stimulant effect. In fact, the perceived high may be the suppression of low-grade withdrawal symptoms or the absence of feeling low.

Campus Resources

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Thursday, 3-6 p.m.
Beginning August 17, 1995
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