

Caffeine

Caffeine is a chemical found in over 60 varieties of plants. It is a stimulant affecting the central nervous system. When taken in small amounts it is relatively harmless. In large amounts however, it can become addictive and cause side effects. The most common sources are coffee beans, tealeaves and cocoa beans. Some drinks like Coke, Red Bull and “V” also contain caffeine as well as some cold and flu remedies and diet pills.

Adverse effects

People’s reactions to caffeine vary greatly. Side effects can include:

- Raised blood pressure
- Stomach and bowel upsets e.g. loose motions
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Heart palpitations
- Nervousness
- Irritability
- Loss of sleep
- Increased urination.

It is recommended that adults do not exceed 300mg of caffeine per day.

Where is it found?

Food/Drink	Mg of caffeine	Number that would make up 300mg*
Brewed coffee -per 250ml cup	80 – 120mg	3
Espresso, cappuccino, latte	120mg	2
Instant coffee -1 teaspoon	65mg	5
Tea, strong, per 250ml cup	80mg	3
Tea, average strength, per cup	50mg	6
Tea, weak, per cup	20-30mg	10-15
Cocoa, 2 teaspoons per cup	20mg	15
Cola drinks, 370 ml can	35-55mg	6
Chocolate bars 100g bar	20mg	5
Energy drinks (Redbull, V, etc) per 250ml	80mg	3

The body does not store caffeine so the effects wear off two to three hours after drinking or eating. You can build up a tolerance to caffeine – after awhile you may need stronger coffee or more cups each day.

This information is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or individual consultation with a Registered Dietitian. This information may only be used in its entirety.

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Canterbury
District Health Board
Te Pōari Hauora o Waitānā

Caffeine and Children

Everyone reacts differently to caffeine and this is particularly so for children. For a child, two or more cans of a cola drink i.e. about 100 mg of caffeine, is equivalent to eight cups of instant coffee in an adult. Children can become sleepless, restless, hyperactive, experience digestive problems, irregular heartbeats and raised blood pressure. Large amounts of caffeine may also affect bone strength and development.

Caffeine and pregnancy

Caffeine passes to the baby through the placenta. The baby lacks the enzymes necessary for caffeine metabolism. A UK committee has recently recommended that pregnant women limit their caffeine intake to no more than 300mg/day.

Caffeine and exercise

Energy drinks containing caffeine have become popular with sports people and teenagers. These drinks contain caffeine or guarana or a combination. Guarana is an herb containing some caffeine and other nerve stimulating substances.

Recommendations

- Keep your intake to below 300mg per day

This is equivalent to

2 espresso or cappuccino OR
4 cups of coffee (made with 1 teaspoon instant coffee) OR
6 cups of tea

- Take particular care if you:-
 - have a stomach ulcer or reflux
 - are very sensitive to caffeine
 - are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Avoid extra caffeine sources such as guarana. If you like energy drinks, take them instead of tea and coffee, not as well.
- Reduce caffeinated drinks and foods gradually. Doing it suddenly may cause withdrawal symptoms like headaches and nausea.

Cutting back

Try limiting yourself to one or two cups a day that you make a point of enjoying, rather than going for lots of refills.

Try some decaffeinated alternatives:-

- Decaffeinated coffee, teas and soft drinks
- Herbal teas
- Milk, milkshakes and smoothies
- Milo and hot chocolate have lower amounts of caffeine compared with coffee and tea
- Hot fruit juices like blackberry or apple
- Chicory, dandelion root or barley based coffee

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