

# Caffeine

Caffeine is a chemical compound that found naturally in the leaves, seeds or fruits of some plants.

The caffeine is normally consumed in drinks, such as coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks, chocolate bars and drinks.

These days, caffeine is also found in some over-the-counter medicines such as cough syrup and slimming tablets.



It stimulates the brain and nervous system, giving people the 'caffeine buzz'. However, different people react to caffeine differently, depending on the frequency and quantity. A small amount of caffeine does make you feel more alert and full of energy. It also has antioxidants which promotes good health. However, **excessive amount of caffeine** may cause dehydration , dizziness, rapid heart beat, anxiety and insomnia (difficult to sleep).

If you have caffeine regularly, you can build up your tolerance. That means you will need more caffeine than usual to give you the same effects. Also, if you normally have too much caffeine and suddenly stop having it, you may experience withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, tiredness, anxiety and irritability. Therefore, the best way to quit caffeine is **to cut down gradually over time**, allowing your body to get used to less caffeine.



**Remember to enjoy caffeine in moderation. More caffeine may not be good for you.**

So far, there is no conclusive research that can relate the caffeine intake from food or drinks with ill health.



## How much should I have caffeine?

It is recommended to have **no more than 4-5 cups of instant coffee** (300-400mg per day).  
If you don't drink any, you don't need to start the habit.



### Average caffeine content of some food and drinks:

Tea: 10-50mg

Chocolate bar 20-60mg per 30g bar

Cola drinks 50mg per 375ml can

Instant coffee (1tsp): 60-80mg

Percolated or drip coffee: 60-120mg

Energy or sports drinks 80mg per 250ml can

**Energy drinks** are beverages containing caffeine, taurine and guarana. They are marketed as drinks which can 'give you more energy'. However, there is no conclusive evidence.

Energy drinks are concerning because their **nutrient content is very poor**. They are high in added sugar and energy which can lead to weight gain.

If you're **pregnant**, it is best to have **no more than 1 regular espresso or 3 cups of instant coffee or 4 cups of tea per day (less than 200mg per day) or avoid them at all**. Energy drinks are not recommended for pregnant women as they may contain high levels of caffeine. Excess caffeine in pregnancy may increase your risk of miscarriage, birth difficulties and low birth weight babies.

### Ways to cut down caffeine

- Water is the best!
- Sparkling water with mint leaves/sliced ginger/lemon
- Herbal tea ie. chamomile, lemongrass tea
- Decaffeinated coffee and tea
- If you feel tired/sleepy, stretch or walk outside and enjoy the sun for 5-10minutes!

As for children, there is **no need for children to have any caffeine**.

Watch out for soft drinks, chocolate bars and drinks.

### References:

1. Channel BH. Caffeine. 2012 [cited 2012 10 April]; Available from: <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/caffeine?open>.
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