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## Caffeine

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# Caffeine

Caffeine is a drug that affects the central nervous system. It can make people feel more alert. For most adults, an intake of 200 to 300 milligrams of caffeine daily is not harmful. However, more caffeine can cause problems.

High levels of caffeine can cause

- Irritability
- Upset stomach
- Nervousness
- Diarrhea
- Anxiety
- Increased heart rate
- Difficulty sleeping
- Increased blood pressure
- Headaches
- Dehydration
- Difficulty concentrating

## Sources of Caffeine

Caffeine is found in tea leaves and kola nuts. It is also found in coffee and cocoa beans. Tea, cola drinks, coffee, cocoa and chocolate are natural sources of caffeine. Americans get the most natural caffeine from coffee. The amount of caffeine in one cup of coffee or tea depends upon how it is made. Generally, brewed coffee or tea has more caffeine than instant coffee or

tea. Longer brewing time increases the caffeine content. Coffee and tea that are darker in color usually contain more caffeine. Espresso and chai teas may contain more caffeine. Dark chocolate contains more caffeine than milk chocolate

Soft drinks often contain added caffeine. Caffeine content of soft drinks varies from 0 to 72 milligrams per 12-ounce serving. Diet formulas of soft drinks often contain more caffeine than their regular counterparts.

Energy drinks and water with added caffeine have become very popular. These can contain from 50 to 300 milligrams of caffeine per can or bottle. Because they contain high levels of caffeine, they may increase the heart rate and blood pressure. Energy drinks can also dehydrate the body and cause sleeping problems. They may cause a severe loss of fluids if used while working out.

Many people like to mix energy drinks with alcohol in order to stay alert. This is a dangerous trend. The high levels of caffeine in energy drinks mask the effects of the alcohol. Then people don't realize they are impaired. This habit can lead to drunk driving, blackouts, dehydration and vomiting while asleep.

Medicines are another source of caffeine. Over-the-counter diet aids may contain 200 milligrams per capsule. Pain medications often contain between 16 and 70 milligrams per capsule.

Caffeine can become habit-forming. People who regularly drink beverages with caffeine often find that they need higher doses of caffeine to get the same effects. When caffeine intake is stopped suddenly, some people experience headaches, temporary depression, muscle pain and drowsiness. It is best to reduce caffeine slowly. Try cutting back one caffeine drink per week until you reach 100 milligrams or fewer per day.

## Caffeine and Children

Children are much more sensitive to caffeine than adults. They can face the same side effects as adults after eating or drinking a smaller amount. The United States do not have guidelines for caffeine intake for children, but the guidelines in Canada suggest a limit of 45 milligrams per day for preschool children. This is about the same amount of caffeine found in one 12-ounce soft drink. Soft drinks are the main source of caffeine for children in the United States.

Look at the table to see how much caffeine you get from natural sources.

## Caffeinated items and their amounts.

Item	Amount (oz)	Caffeine (mg)
Brewed coffee	6	103
Instant coffee, prepared	6	57
Diet cola	12	50
Regular cola	12	37
Brewed tea	6	36
Instant tea, prepared	6	26-36
Dark chocolate bar	1.45	30
Milk chocolate bar	1.55	11
Chocolate milk	8	5-8

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service (2000)

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