

Caffeine

Caffeine is one of the world's most popular drugs, a natural part of many foods and drinks. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate and some drugs for colds and headaches are common sources of caffeine. Did you know:

- Canadians get over half of their caffeine from coffee.
- Each day, almost all the adults in Ontario have at least one item that contains caffeine.
- Caffeine can start to affect you within one hour and takes over seven hours to leave the body.
- In a healthy adult, especially if you are not used to caffeine, 100-450 mg (one to four cups of coffee) can:
 - make you more alert if you feel tired,
 - make your heart beat faster,
 - increase the number of calories your body burns,
 - cause you to have trouble sleeping, and
 - give you headaches and diarrhea.

Too much caffeine each day can make you feel edgy, unhappy and depressed. Since children are smaller in size, caffeine may have a bigger effect on them.

How much is okay?

Health Canada suggests that we have no more than 450 mg of caffeine a day. This is about 4 cups of regular coffee or 12 10-oz (280 ml) cans of cola drink.

Does caffeine increase your risk of heart disease or cancer?

The link between caffeine, heart disease and cancer is not clear. While moderate use of caffeine does not appear to increase your risk, the effects of high caffeine intake over a long time are still unknown.

Caffeine and women: Should pregnant, breast-feeding or older women avoid caffeine?

Caffeine does enter the fetus and also passes into breast milk. The fetus is not able to get rid of the caffeine and an infant does it very slowly. As little as 150 mg a day may increase risk of low birth weight and birth defects. You do not have to cut out caffeine completely but since its effects are not clear it is a good idea to limit your intake. For the older woman, risk of osteoporosis increases if you have more than 450 mg of caffeine and less than 750 mg of calcium (2 1/2 cups of milk) a day.

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Want to make a change?

If you are interested in cutting your caffeine, start today and do it slowly! Breaking the habit suddenly can make you feel tense, tired and give you headaches. Next time you visit your favorite coffee house, try a cup of decaffeinated coffee, herbal tea, chocolate milk, hot chocolate, juice or milk.

	Average amount (mg)	
Coffee	(178 ml or 6 oz)	
	Instant regular	75
	Automatic percolated	108
	Filter drip	150
	Decaffeinated (brewed and instant)	4
Tea	(178 ml or 6 oz)	
	Weak: 1 minute brew	36
	Strong: 5 minute brew	95
Cola Drinks	(280 ml or 10 oz)	36
Chocolate milk	(225 ml or 7.5 oz)	5
Dark Chocolate Bar	(56 g or 2 oz)	45
Cold Remedies		23
Headache Relievers		31

Reference: Caffeine A Perspective on Current concerns. National Institute of Nutrition. May 1987.