The Buzz on Caffeine

We wake up and what is the first thought that crosses our mind? Coffee. Whether it is a skinny vanilla latte, a hot chai tea, or a classic cup of black, we usually get our fix. Is this morning ritual hurting our health? There is confusing information out there in the media. One day we read an enticing article about coffee and caffeine having health benefits, and the next day we read that caffeine can be detrimental to our health. So, what’s the deal?

Our one cup of coffee in the morning is not going to be catastrophic to our health. It is the one cup of coffee in the morning, diet soda at lunch, another soda or coffee to power through the afternoon, soda with dinner, and that last energy drink or espresso that gets us though our late night studying that can be an issue. The problem is excessive caffeine consumption from a variety of drinks.

How much can I drink?

So how much caffeine should we limit it to? It is not an exact science when it comes to how much is too much. The threshold is very individual. Caffeine sensitivity depends on many things including the amount and frequency of caffeine ingested, body weight, physical condition, and overall anxiety level. For most healthy adults, moderate amounts of caffeine, which is considered 200 to 300 milligrams a day, is safe for health. (1) Here are some popular drinks and medicine that contain caffeine:

- Grande Starbucks Coffee: 330mg
- Medium Dunkin’ Donut Coffee: 178mg
- 8 oz. Generic brewed coffee: 150mg
- 20oz. Diet coke: 78mg
- Red Bull Energy Drink: 80mg
- Monster/Rockstar Energy Drink: 160mg
- 5 hour Energy Shot: 208 mg
- Excedrin Migraine (2 tablets): 130mg

So what does 200-300 mg of caffeine look like?

- Two 8 oz. cups of coffee: 300 mg
- 8 oz. cup of coffee and a 20 oz. diet coke: 228 mg
- Monster energy drink and a 20 oz. diet coke: 238 mg
- Monster energy drink and an 8oz. cup of coffee: Over 300 mg!

What happens when I drink too much?

Side effects of excessive consumption can include sleep deprivation, nausea, cramping, anxiety, fatigue, and headaches. Excessive caffeine could impair athletic training and performance by causing muscle tightness, muscle cramping, and possibly dehydration. (2-5)

How does caffeine even work?
Caffeine does sometimes work to fight fatigue and gives us a little energy boost. Our brain produces a natural sedative called adenosine. What happens is caffeine binds to adenosine receptors in the brain, blocking out adenosine, preventing it from making us feel sleepy. However, if we drink caffeine regularly, we will start to develop a tolerance to this effect. We develop this tolerance because the brain compensates by making more receptors to allow adenosine to bind along with caffeine. When this happens, we feel fatigued despite our energy drinks, coffees, and sodas. (6)

Should I ditch caffeine completely?
It might not be a bad idea; we certainly do not require caffeine in our diet. In fact, a daily cup of Joe could actually be making you more tired during the day. Research has found daily dietary caffeine intake is associated with disturbed sleep and associated daytime sleepiness. (7)

What are some healthy natural ways to get an energy boost?

- **Exercise:** Try getting 30 to 60 minutes of daily exercise to improve your mood and energy.
- **Power snacks:** Carbohydrates are our body’s natural energy source. Caffeine may give you a spurt of energy, but to keep going strong throughout the day we should eat whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables!
- **Take a yoga class:** Certain yoga poses refresh the body and energize you more than a cup of coffee.
- **Listen to high-energy music:** Music does a great job at waking us up and getting us going. Pop in your head phones on your walk to class, or better yet, while you are exercising to get the most out of your workout!
- **Take a 20-minute power nap:** Crashing for 20 minutes is usually all people need to recharge their battery. Be sure to set an alarm though and only take about 20 minutes. Longer naps tend to leave individuals feeling groggy, rather than refreshed.

References
