

Ask Dr. Tastebud



Volume 2, issue 3

Dear Dr. Tastebud,

Is drinking coffee bad for my health? My coworkers say it is, and that it will make me chronically dehydrated. I've been drinking it for years and I feel fine, so there's no problem. Who's right?

Sincerely,
A.M. Buzz

Dear A.M.,

I'm glad you asked, because you're probably not the only one with this question. Did you know that 90% of American adults consume caffeine each day, most of which comes from coffee?

Research has shown that caffeine consumed in moderation doesn't cause problems in healthy adults. The American Dietetic Association considers 200-300 mg of caffeine (the equivalent of about two to three cups of coffee) to be a moderate amount.

Does coffee cause dehydration?

The theory that coffee will dehydrate you is based on the fact that caffeine is a diuretic, but the effect is actually mild. This means that while you might urinate more within the hour or two after drinking coffee than you would if had zero caffeine, the water in the coffee will offset the urine output.

Are there health benefits?

Not only is caffeine in moderation safe, it might actually have health benefits. It is well known that caffeine is a stimulant that increases alertness, but recent research suggests additional benefits.

For example, the caffeine in coffee might help prevent symptoms of Parkinson's Disease, asthma and headaches.

Also, some research suggests that other compounds in coffee may help prevent Type 2 Diabetes and dental caries. But since none of this is proven, no one is suggesting that we should all be drinking a pot of coffee per day.

Are there any health risks?

While a cup or two of coffee is probably just fine, caffeine in excess can be a problem. More than about 500-600 mg (about two to three jumbo mugs or five to six cups of coffee) can over-stimulate your system and make you feel jittery or cause stomach or bowel upset. Some medications can interact with caffeine, so ask your doctor if you should steer clear of it. Also, some people simply may be extra sensitive to caffeine.

Pregnant women may also benefit from avoidance of caffeine. Recent research suggests that drinking more than a few cups of coffee or other caffeinated beverages a day may increase her risk of miscarriage. In the study, women who consumed more than 200 mg of caffeine a day had twice the risk of miscarriage as pregnant women who consumed no caffeine.

This study suggests an association between caffeine and miscarriage, but does not conclusively show cause and effect. The women who consumed the most caffeine were also more likely to have other risk factors which include being over 35 years of age, having a history of miscarriage, having no morning

sickness symptoms, smoking and alcohol consumption. Women who are pregnant, or thinking about getting pregnant, should discuss whether or not they should avoid caffeine with their physician.

What about other caffeine containing beverages and foods?

Since you asked about coffee, you should know that tea, soda pop, energy drinks, and chocolate are other common sources of caffeine. Below is a chart listing common caffeine sources and the amount of caffeine they contain.

Food/Drink	Serving Size (oz)	Caffeine (mg)
Plain brewed coffee	8	102 - 200
Instant coffee	8	27 - 173
Starbucks Caffe Latte	8	75
Black tea	8	47
Green tea	8	30
Jolt	12	71
Mountain Dew	12	55
Surge	12	51
Diet Coke	12	46
Pepsi-Cola	12	38
Coca-Cola	12	35
Sunkist orange soda	12	41
A&W Crème Soda	12	22
Snapple Flavored Teas	12	32
Nestea Sweet Iced Tea	12	26
Red Bull	8.3	76
Spike Shooter	8.4	300
SoBe Adrenaline Rush	8.3	79
Enviga	12	100
Glaceau Vitamin Water Energy Citrus	20	50
Ben & Jerry's Coffee	8	84
Heath Bar Crunch		
Hershey's Special Dark chocolate bar	1.45	33
Hershey's chocolate bar	1.55	9
Jolt caffeinate gum	1 stick	33
Hot cocoa	8	3 - 13

<http://www.cspinet.org/new/cafchart.htm>

Although many American adults consume soda pop and chocolate, the caffeine content is relatively low compared to coffee, so it takes quite a bit of candy and pop to exceed moderation, though several of the so-called energy drinks pack a punch that exceeds the amount in a cup of coffee. Also, children can get a “buzz” from pop and chocolate because their bodies are smaller; so be sure to oversee their intake of these foods. Hyperactive behavior attributed to the sugar in food may in fact be due to caffeine. Keep in mind that the amount of caffeine in tea varies greatly by the brew strength and type of tea.

Jessica Reed, BGSU Dietetics Student

References

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***Do you have a question for Dr. Tastebud?
Send an e-mail to chaar@bgsu.edu***

