

## UW HEALTH - ONLINE HEALTH FACT

### Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant naturally present in coffee, tea, cocoa and other products. It is added to some soft drinks and medicines.

#### What Does Caffeine Do?

Caffeine can:

- Stimulate the central nervous system and heart
- Relax smooth muscle
- Cause increased urine output
- Cause your stomach to make more acid

Caffeine affects of the central nervous system can be seen by:

- More rapid breathing
- A faster heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Trouble sleeping
- Heart rhythm.
- Produce more stress hormones.

The “wake up” effect of caffeine peaks about one hour after it is consumed and lasts up to 2 to 3 hours.

#### Is Too Much Caffeine Harmful?

Up to 200 milligrams of caffeine per day (about 1 cup of drip coffee or 4 cans of soda) seems to be fairly harmless. Higher doses can cause you to feel nervous, irritable, and anxious. You may have trouble falling asleep and have intestinal discomfort. Caffeine’s effects vary from person to person. Some people can consume large amounts of caffeine without bad effects. Others are quite sensitive to small amounts of caffeine. Caffeine is not addictive, but it is habit-forming. If you stop taking it all of a sudden you may get headaches and feel irritable.

#### How Much Caffeine is Safe?

Studies on caffeine have shown:

- In older women with calcium intakes less than the RDA (800mg/day), caffeine taken in amounts equal to or greater than that obtained from 2 to 3 servings of brewed coffee a day has been shown to increase the rate of bone loss. No adverse effects have been shown in women with calcium intakes near or above the RDA.
- There is no proof that caffeine causes birth defects in humans.
- Animal studies have failed to show that caffeine causes cancer in rats.
- A lot of interest has been focused on finding out if there is a link between caffeine intake and fibrocystic breast disease. Recent studies have failed to show any link between this breast disease and coffee intake.
- Coffee may raise cholesterol levels if consumed in large amounts, but these effects are due to oils in coffee, not to caffeine.

For most people, some caffeine intake is fine. Even so, be careful not to consume caffeine instead of eating a meal. Caffeine is best used along with food to improve concentration and productivity. Most researchers agree that up to 200 mg of caffeine per day is not harmful.

Pregnant women are urged to limit their intake of caffeine to 200 mg/day or less. Although no research has shown that caffeine causes birth defects in humans, it is known that caffeine crosses the placenta and reaches the fetus. A breast fed child can get caffeine from a nursing mother's breast milk, which may cause irritability in the infant. Therefore, it is good for both pregnant and nursing women to limit the amount of caffeine.

**Caffeine Content of Beverages, Food and Drugs**

<i>Soft drinks, 12 ounces</i>	<i>milligrams caffeine</i>
Mountain Dew	52
Diet RC	48
Coca-Cola, Cherry Coke, Diet Coke, Diet Cherry Coke	46
Pepsi	38
Dr. Pepper	37
Diet Pepsi	36
RC Cola	18
Cherry RC	12
<b><i>Coffee, 8 ounces</i></b>	
Drip	185
Percolator	130
Instant	104
Decaffeinated	3-5
Espresso coffee (single, 2 ounce)	100
<b><i>Tea, 8 ounces</i></b>	
Brewed	60-95
Instant	50
Herbal	0
<b><i>Chocolate</i></b>	
Chocolate bar (1 average)	25
Cocoa/hot chocolate (8 ounces)	6
Chocolate milk (8 ounces)	5
Milk chocolate (1 ounces)	6
<b><i>Medicines</i></b>	
Vivarin	200
No Doz	100
Excedrin	65
Anacin, Vanquish, Midol	33
Coricidin, Sinarest, Triminicin	30

Adapted from *FDA Consumer*, Dec/Jan 1988.

*Food Values of Portions Commonly Used* by J. Pennington, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1998.

If you have more questions please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below.

Nutrition Clinic Room 193  
 University Station  
 2880 University Avenue  
 Madison, WI 53705  
 (608) 263-5012

Nutrition Clinic Room 1296  
 UW Health West Clinic  
 451 Junction Road  
 Madison, WI 53717  
 (608) 265-7526

Nutrition Clinic Room 2085  
 UW Health East Clinic  
 5249 East Terrace Drive  
 Madison, WI 53718  
 (608) 265-0963