

# The Harmful Effects of Caffeine

Caffeine consumption has become as much a part of the lives of many people as breathing. From coffee and tea to soft drinks and even chocolate, many people joke that they can't start the day without relying on some form of caffeine.

The toll that caffeine can take on the human body, however, is sobering. Far from a laughing matter, the long-term health complications that result from even moderate caffeine consumption may come as a shock to many.

## What is Caffeine?

Found in the seeds, leaves, and fruit of plants, caffeine is consumed primarily in the form of coffee, tea, and soft drinks, but is also found in chocolate and other foods. While many people would not openly classify themselves as drug users, the fact is that caffeine is known as a stimulant drug.

Considered the world's most widely-used, legal psychoactive drug, it is estimated that 90 percent of adults in the United States consume some form of caffeine on a daily basis — with many of them consuming the drug in high amounts.

Classified as “safe” by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), caffeine is widely considered to be an actual *benefit* to health, having been proven to provide a modest preventative measure against some diseases, such as Parkinson's Disease and some forms of cancer.

One of the reasons that caffeine may be seen as beneficial to people's daily routine could be the fact that the stimulant nature of the drug tends to keep people awake and alert for long periods of time.

## What Products Contain Caffeine?

Several products contain caffeine, including:

- coffee and tea
- soft drinks
- energy drinks
- chocolate
- ice cream
- weight loss pills
- pain relievers (aspirin)
- herbal supplements
- breath freshener
- and more

## What's the Problem with Caffeine?

Caffeine has been proven to carry several side-effects and potential health complications, including:

- dehydration
- fatigue
- anxiety / irritability
- heightened effects of pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS)
- mood swings / depression
- nausea

- insomnia
- night tremors
- increased heart rate / high blood pressure
- restricted circulation
- panic attacks

## **How to Reduce and Eliminate Caffeine Dependency**

As with any other drug, caffeine is an addictive substance. Some people may find it difficult to reduce or eliminate their dependency on caffeine. The process, however, is not impossible.

Because caffeine is both physiologically and psychologically addictive, those wishing to reduce or eliminate their dependency on caffeine should take care to slowly wean themselves off the drug. Withdrawal symptoms — in some cases severe — could result from attempts at rapid cessation of caffeine use.

Many medical experts agree that a person could be considered a caffeine ‘addict’ if they:

- drink more than four cups of coffee per day
- become jittery without a daily caffeine ‘fix’
- are not able to concentrate without caffeine
- are not able to control their emotions without caffeine

One method by which people can reduce or eliminate their caffeine dependency is to keep a sort of ‘caffeine journal,’ where they monitor the amount of caffeine being consumed each day. This journal should be shared with a qualified medical professional who can analyze this intake and make recommendations to cut back and eventually eliminate the caffeine dependency. ■