



What is caffeine? Is it bad for my health?

Where is caffeine found?

Caffeine is found naturally in over 60 plants such as coffee and cocoa beans, tea leaves, kola nut, yerba mate, and guarana. It's also used in soft drinks, energy drinks and drugs such as some cold and pain remedies. Coffee and tea are the main sources of caffeine for adults, while soft drinks are the main sources for children.

How does caffeine affect my health?

It's well-known that caffeine makes us more alert. Some people are more sensitive to caffeine than others and may find caffeine causes restlessness, anxiety, nervousness, insomnia or stomach upset.

Caffeine is also popular among athletes and active individuals, since it can improve performance in some sports.

People often wonder whether caffeine is safe.

- Right now, it appears that a moderate caffeine intake does not increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis or cancer.
- Contrary to popular opinion, caffeinated drinks do not dehydrate us, especially if we are used to caffeine.

How much caffeine is safe?

Many different foods and beverages contain **varying amounts of caffeine**. Caffeine is also found in some medications, such as cold and headache remedies. Read product labels carefully and check with your pharmacist to see if your prescription medication has caffeine.

Health Canada provides recommendations for moderate caffeine intake:

- It is recommended that adults limit their caffeine intake to no more than 400 mg/day. This is about the amount found in three 8-ounce cups of regular coffee.
- Health Canada also recommends that pregnant and breastfeeding women limit their intake to no more than 300 mg per day (about two, 8oz cups of coffee or six, 8oz cups of tea).
- Recommended limits for children are even lower. For children aged 12 and under Health Canada recommends a maximum daily intake of no more than 2.5mg/kg of body weight. Based on average weight, that works out to be no more than:
 - 45 mg/day for children 4-6 years
 - 62.5 mg/day for children 7-9 years
 - 85 mg/day for children 10-12 years

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It doesn't take much for children to reach these limits; a 12-oz (355 mL) can of cola contains about 30 mg of caffeine and a solid milk chocolate bar has contains about 10 mg.

- For children, drinks such as cola should be limited, especially for young children. That's because of cola's caffeine content and because it might replace healthier foods.
- Energy drinks are not recommended for children because of their high caffeine content and other ingredients. The caffeine in a can of energy drink can vary. One energy drink could have well above the maximum caffeine level that is safe for children and teens.
- Health Canada hasn't developed a definitive amount of caffeine that is safe for teens; however, a caffeine intake of no more than 2.5mg/kg of body weight is recommended.

For the average healthy adult, moderate caffeine intakes pose no health risk, especially if we eat a balanced diet and enjoy regular physical activity.

Trying to cut back?

Many people who are used to having caffeine experience side effects like headaches and drowsiness when they suddenly stop taking it. Here are some tips to cut back slowly:

- Mix your regular coffee with half decaffeinated coffee.
- Try caffeine-free herbal teas or apple cider for a hot drink.
- Choose a latte or café-au-lait instead of brewed coffee.
- Brew tea for less time.
- Try caffeine-free versions of your favourite carbonated beverages.

Important Warning – Health Canada warns us to never mix caffeine with ephedrine (ma huang) due to potential serious health risks.