

# Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

Many of us rely on a caffeine hit to get going in the morning. Caffeine is found not only in coffee but also in tea, some soft drinks and "energy drinks". Caffeine is a methylxanthine compound that acts as a mild stimulant. It increases the heart and breathing rate and dilates blood vessels (except in the brain). Therefore it boosts alertness and concentration and makes us feel energised. These effects are only short-lived (approximately 30-60 minutes) however there can be a lingering effect that lasts up to ten hours.

Bus and truck drivers, shift workers and airline pilots sometimes use caffeine to help them stay awake. Athletes have used caffeine as a short-term energy booster. Caffeine is no longer on the World Anti-Doping Agency's banned list. In fact, in large doses, it is performance decreasing.

Caffeine can be addictive. Withdrawal symptoms can consist of headaches, irritability and loss of concentration. However it is a lot less addictive than nicotine and alcohol. The amount of caffeine in a cup of coffee varies enormously depending upon the type of beans, the way they are roasted, stored and infused. It can vary between 50mg and 259mg per cup. Espresso coffee has the most caffeine while coffee brewed from grounds is often as low at 50mg. Instant coffee can range from 50mg to 75mg depending on how strong you make it. Up to 300mg of caffeine per day is considered a moderate intake without harmful effects.

There are many arguments for and against coffee consumption. On the positive side coffee contains antioxidants that help prevent heart disease and certain types of cancers. It is claimed that this occurs by removing cell destroying oxygen radicals from the blood. Chinese studies claim coffee can reduce the symptoms of Parkinson's disease and American research supports the idea that coffee can reduce the chance of developing type 2 diabetes. Other research suggests coffee reduces the risk of kidney stone and gallstones. Coffee also increases stomach acid, this could aid digestion, however if you suffer from stomach ulcers, increased stomach acid is the last thing you need! A further study suggested that coffee could lessen the airway constriction of people with asthma.

On the negative side, risks associated with coffee consumption are a reduction in fertility, higher levels of homocystine (which can lead to coronary heart disease) and loss of calcium resulting in bone density problems. It has also been proven that women who drink large amounts of coffee are at risk of developing urinary incontinence. I have found arguments both for and against coffee consumption when it comes to both raising and lowering the level of cholesterol. It appears that the typical drip coffee makers and percolators remove the cafestol, which can increase cholesterol levels. Boiling the coffee grounds in water does not filter out the cafestol.

To sum up, excess coffee will keep you awake and may cause nervousness. It should definitely be avoided if you suffer from stomach ulcers. It is not recommended for pregnant women or children. However, if you are not experiencing any of the conditions stated above, a moderate amount of coffee appears to have no harmful effects.

Yours in health,

*Jeni*

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