

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Overcaffeinated?

Many people don't realize that caffeine is a drug. It's a stimulant that's found in many types of pain and cold medicine as well as in foods and drinks, including coffee, tea, chocolate, some energy drinks and some painkillers.

What are the short-term effects?

The effects of caffeine usually start within five to 30 minutes and can last from eight to 12 hours. Larger amounts of caffeine can:

- cause shaking
- make you have trouble sleeping
- make you very agitated
- cause a fast, irregular heartbeat (might feel like your heart is racing)
- make you feel irritable, restless, and nervous

People who have panic attacks shouldn't use large amounts of caffeine. It can trigger nervousness and anxiety, and they might be more sensitive to its effects.

It's rare for adults to die from a caffeine overdose. However, children can die from as little as one gram of caffeine. A single cup of coffee contains between 40 and 180 mg.

Caffeine doesn't decrease your appetite so there's no point in using it to diet or decrease your hunger.

Caffeine doesn't help you sober up if you are drunk.

As your body gets used to caffeine, it needs more and more of it to get the same effect. As the amount of caffeine goes up, so does the risk of side effects.

You can become mildly dependent on caffeine from regularly drinking 350 mg (about two to four cups of coffee) a day. If you suddenly stop drinking caffeine, you might have withdrawal symptoms such as:

- headaches
- problems sleeping
- feeling irritable, tired, and depressed
- lack of energy
- feeling down
- having trouble focusing or concentrating

Withdrawal symptoms begin 12 to 24 hours after you stop caffeine. Most symptoms go away within a few days.

What are the long-term effects of caffeine?

More than 300 mg of caffeine (about two to three cups of coffee) in a day may be linked to miscarriages and low-birth weight babies. Caffeine is passed through breastmilk, which might make your baby irritable or have trouble sleeping. If you're pregnant or breastfeeding you may want to limit or avoid all caffeine.

Some women who drink (more than three cups a day) may be at risk of bone fractures as they get older.

Regular use of more than 600 mg of caffeine might cause long-term effects including chronic insomnia, constant anxiety, depression, and stomach problems. It can also cause high blood pressure or make high blood pressure worse.

Caffeine and young people

Because their bodies are smaller, caffeine may have a stronger effect on a child than on an adult. Children who drink pop or energy drinks with caffeine might feel anxious, be irritable, have trouble sleeping, or wet the bed.

Some teens and young adults who use a lot of caffeine may have health problems like an increased or abnormal heart rate or chest pain. If this happens, they may need to go to the hospital or need an ambulance.

For more information on caffeine and health, call the [24-hour Addiction Helpline](#) at 1-866-332-2322.