


[Home Page](#)
[Cover Article](#)
[Reflections](#)
[Business
Spotlight](#)
[Been There
Now What](#)
[Laughing
at Life](#)
[Gourmet
Cooking](#)
[Kids Crafts
& Puzzles](#)
[Health
& Fitness](#)
[Men's Issues](#)
[Places Of
Worship](#)
[Monthly
Meetings](#)
[Join Our
E-Mail List](#)
[Advertise
With Us](#)
[Subscribe
By Mail](#)
[Contact Us](#)

Caffeine: Friend or Foe?

By Daniel Casciato

According to the National Coffee Association, more than 167 million Americans – 60% of the population – drank at least one cup of coffee daily last year. That’s about 6.3 billion gallons.

If you’ve seen the long lines in cafes, that shouldn’t come as a surprise. When the weather is cold, we look for hot drinks like café mochas to keep us warm. When it’s hot, avid coffee drinkers look for something cool, laced with caffeine.

That quick burst of energy from hot or chilled caffeinated drinks might make us feel good for a short period of time, but is it all right for our overall health?

Yes and no.

Most of us are like Gina Milcoff of McCandless Township who drinks about two to three cups of coffee every morning. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it can slightly increase our metabolic rate and enhance alertness. “I definitely feel more alert after I drink my coffee,” Milcoff says. “I can normally only go a few hours without having my caffeine.”

According to eDiets.com Chief Nutritionist, Susan Burke, caffeine is the most commonly used stimulant in the world and is found in many different foods. It occurs naturally in coffee and tea and is added to soda, bottled drinks and over-the-counter drugs such as aspirin. Despite that jolt of energy it provides, it’s important to know the unpleasant side effects of caffeine.

“It has a diuretic effect and excessive caffeine is known to cause insomnia, irritability, and may increase your blood pressure,” she says. “Caffeine is also addictive, and people may suffer withdrawal symptoms if they are used to consuming it and stop suddenly. Some of these symptoms include headaches, irritability and nervousness.”

Another problem is that excessive caffeine can interfere with calcium absorption, adds Wendy Vida, a registered dietician in the Preventive Health Services Department with Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield. “This may be something you want to eliminate if you suffer from osteoporosis.”

Vida says that there are other negative side effects of caffeine including depression, restlessness and fatigue. “However, everyone is different and some people can tolerate side effects better than others,” she says.

The news is not all bad.

“The good news is that caffeine has not been linked to cardiovascular diseases or cancer,” says Vida. “There is no research to support this. Also, moderate coffee drinking doesn’t appear to be harmful, and in some cases can improve performance. Our biggest concern is that people replace caffeinated beverages with healthier drinks.”

Vida suggests limiting your caffeine intake to 200-300 milligrams daily (two to three 5-ounce cups) and follow a healthy meal plan. For those who want to decrease their caffeine intake, Vida suggests to take it slow and to decrease your intake by a half-cup per day.

“You don’t have to eliminate it from your diet,” she says. “Just make sure you’re not consuming more than 300

milligrams daily.”

Still need an extra kick? The National Coffee Association offers these tips as some alternative ways to boost your energy:

- Don't skip breakfast. It can make you feel weak physically and not as sharp mentally.
- Avoid overeating at lunchtime. Eating large meals leads to sleepiness.
- Go for a walk. Walking just 10 minutes can improve blood flow and boost energy.
- Get enough sleep. Most of us need about 7-8 hours of sleep at night. Too little sleep or interrupted sleep puts a strain on physical and mental performance.
- Limit alcohol intake. Alcohol is a depressant that slows brain activity.

To learn more about caffeine, nutrition coaches are available at the North Hills YMCA and Allegheny General Hospital. The service is free for Highmark members. Call 1-800-879-2217 for more information.

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North

The Point North