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Mass Caffeination

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Mass Caffeination

Abstract

This poem reflects on caffeine intake in modern society from the perspective of a pharmacologist. It is a free verse, concrete poem that communicates the science of caffeine through both words and visual images.

Author/Artist Bio

Michael J Leach is a statistician, health researcher, and poet with a PhD in Pharmacy and a keen interest in STEAM. Michael works at the Loddon Mallee Integrated Cancer Service, Bendigo Health and undertakes research through Monash University School of Rural Health. His poems have appeared in medical journals, including the Medical Journal of Australia and Medical Humanities, as well as literary journals, including Cordite Poetry Review and Meniscus Literary Journal. He lives in his hometown of Bendigo, Australia.

Keywords

Pharmacology, pharmacodynamics, botany, caffeine, poetry

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Mass Caffeination

Michael J. Leach

Here in this open
-air sanctuary
of societal approval,
we observe
or partake in
the mass consumption
of a certain readily available
psychostimulant.

Our daily routines
feature the regular
infusion and dissolution
of certain botanicals
into hot water,
giving bitter brews
that one may choose
to sweeten
(naturally
or otherwise).

When one consumes
the aromatic
tea of Southwest China/
cocoa of Central America/
coffee of Northeast Africa,
one is in fact
casually taking
a non-prescription drug:
a xanthine
called caffeine.
So it may pay

for us to know something
of caffeine's pharmacodynamics.

After absorbing
thru the small intestine,
flowing in the blood

s
t
r
e
a
m

and crossing
the blood-----brain barrier,
the

C
C Y
I C
L

molecules
of caffeine
bind to adenosine
receptors in the brain.
This process,
known as antagonism,
prevents adenosine
(an endogenous protein)
from locking
into its binding
sites and eliciting
its natural effect –
CNS depression.
Thus,

at approximately
an hour post-consumption,
the caffeine reaches
sufficiently high
blood plasma concentrations
to effectively
fight fatigue
and focus the faculties.

We can take a
pharmacological view
of coffee/cocoa/tea
as, essentially, just a vehicle
for a popular chemical –
that dependable xanthine
that gives a welcome buzz.

We're as free
as cathemeral owls
to reap the benefits
of one of the few
legally non-prescription
performance-enhancing drugs.