

Food and Nutrition



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Understanding Caffeine vs. Kids

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Children enjoy numerous foods and drinks on a regular basis that contain caffeine: soda, chocolate candy, energy drinks, and so forth. In fact, almost 3 out of 4 children consume caffeine regularly (American Academy of Family Physicians, 2020). This is a concern because studies show caffeine can affect children and adults differently, and too much caffeine can have detrimental health effects on kids.

What Is Caffeine?

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, "Caffeine is a stimulant. More than that, it is a drug. It is defined as a drug because it has a physiological effect on the body" (2020). A physiological effect refers to how the body functions. Caffeine can stimulate the central nervous system and give you more energy, but

especially in children, it can cause severe health challenges.

Negative Side Effects

Benton (2017) states that caffeine can cause health problems such as the following:

- Jitters and nervousness.
- Upset stomach.
- Headaches.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Faster heart rate.
- Higher blood pressure.

Caffeine Risks in Children

Caffeine presents risks for children. Consider the following:

- Obesity levels increase in children who consume one or more sweetened sodas a day; in fact, they are 60% more likely to become obese. Many of these soft drinks contain caffeine.
- When children fill up on caffeinated drinks (that usually have no nutritional value), they may not get the valuable vitamins and nutrients their bodies need to keep them healthy.



- Consuming too many caffeinated soft drinks with large amounts of sugar can cause tooth enamel erosion and lead to dental cavities.
- Caffeine can cause dehydration in children because it acts as a diuretic. This may cause children to lose fluids quickly through the elimination of waste.
- Children who become dependent on caffeine, and then quit consuming it quickly, may have withdrawal symptoms. This can cause headaches, muscle aches, or cause irritability.
- Caffeine can cause worsening symptoms in children who might already have heart or nervous disorders. Some children might not even know they are at a higher risk (Benton, 2017).
- Too much caffeine consumption may cause anxiety and worsen mood (American Academy of Family Physicians, 2020).



Caffeine Recommended Daily Limits

Age	Recommended Daily Limit
Adult	Less than 400 mg
Adolescent	Less than 100 mg
Child	0 mg

Source: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 2020

Amount of Caffeine in Popular Foods and Drinks

The following table lists caffeine amounts found in food and beverage items according to the United States Food and Drug Administration and the National Soft Drink Association, as cited by Benton (2017).

Item	Size	Amount of Caffeine
Jolt soft drink	12 oz.	71.2 mg
Mountain Dew	12 oz.	55 mg
Coca-Cola	12 oz.	34 mg
Diet Coke	12 oz.	45 mg
Pepsi	12 oz.	38 mg
Brewed coffee (drip method)	5 oz.	115 mg*
Iced tea	12 oz.	70 mg*
Dark chocolate	1 oz.	20 mg*
Milk chocolate	1 oz.	6 mg*
Cocoa beverage	5 oz.	4 mg*
Chocolate milk beverage	8 oz.	5 mg*
Cold relief medicine	1 tablet	30 mg*

*Average amount of caffeine

Reduce Caffeine Consumption

A simple way to reduce caffeine consumption is to replace soda and other caffeinated beverages with water, milk, or small amounts of 100% fruit juices. Check for caffeine content in the foods that you consume, and exchange them for a healthier option. Caffeine is not classified as a nutrient, and

therefore, does not always appear on a food label. Some unexpected foods that include caffeine are:

- Yogurt.
- Ice cream.
- Decaffeinated coffee.
- Protein bars (American Academy of Family Physicians, 2020).



Beware of withdrawal problems some people may encounter. Remember to cut back slowly. Decreasing caffeine consumption may cause your body to need more sleep because the caffeine provided energy that is now lacking. Give your body some extra sleep and it should return to normal in a few days (Benton, 2017). Although it

may be difficult to avoid caffeine completely, it is important to take the necessary steps to control the amount of caffeine children consume each day. Following this recommendation can lead to improved health, and a longer, healthier life.

References

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