

What Teenagers Want to Know About Caffeine

1. Doesn't everyone drink coffee in the morning?

No. In 2006, only 56% of Americans drank coffee daily.

2. Where is caffeine found?

Caffeine is in many products, including hot and cold coffee, colas and other soft drinks, tea, energy drinks, chocolate. You might not know if caffeine is contained in the food or drink, because many labels don't mention it.

3. What happens when a person eats or drinks caffeine?

Caffeine is a stimulant. It speeds up the central nervous system, your body's control center. It makes your heart beat faster, raises your blood pressure, makes it hard to sleep, can even make you shake.

4. How much caffeine is in my drink?

If you make coffee at home, one 8 oz. cup has about 100 milligrams of caffeine. Most of the coffee you buy at coffee shops have about 150 milligrams of caffeine in an 8 oz. cup. Pepsi and Coke have about 38 milligrams in a 12 oz. can. Red Bull has 80 milligrams in an 8.3 oz. can, the same as Rockstar and Full Throttle. But remember, most of these drinks also contain sugar. This means lots of calories and maybe cavities.

5. Is caffeine the only stimulant?

Other ingredients work like caffeine in your body. Guarana, maté, kola nut, bitter orange (also called citrus aurantium), and green tea extract are also stimulants. Check labels carefully: some products contain more than one stimulant ingredient. Combinations of ingredients affect the body more strongly than just caffeine alone.

6. How much is too much?

If you consume too much caffeine, you'll know it. You'll feel dizzy, nauseous, have a headache, notice your heart beating faster and find it hard to sleep. You could be cranky and your hands might shake.

There are no safety guidelines for teenagers' use of caffeine. The US Food and Drug Administration recommends that adults consume no more than 300 milligrams each day. It's surprising how quickly the amounts of caffeine can add up. In fact, it is possible to overdose on caffeine and end up in the emergency room.

Be careful about caffeine and exercise. This combination can make you dehydrated, especially in hot weather.

7. I've heard that it can be uncomfortable to stop using caffeine.

If you eat or drink something caffeinated each day, your body will notice it if you stop. You might feel dizzy, get a headache, have an upset stomach, feel jittery or nervous, or find yourself more tired than usual. The problem with caffeine is when it wears off, you notice it, and could decide to use it again. This sets up a cycle that can be hard to break.

8. What about energy drinks?

The best way to get energized is to eat healthy foods and get enough sleep. This keeps your body in balance. You may not want to depend on energy drinks or any other drink or product. If you take medication or have a health condition, check with your doctor about caffeine.

9. Can I use caffeine occasionally to help me stay up and study?

Drinking a soft drink, coffee or energy drink will keep you awake but might create a problem when you need to get to sleep later on. There are many ways to focus and study efficiently. A healthy snack helps fuel your brain. Some teens take a break for fresh air. Others put on music and dance for a few minutes to get pepped up.