

# Caffeine

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Our national drink is a caffeinated beverage: tea, coffee, or colas. Caffeine is also present in chocolate. Caffeine has many pharmacologic actions in the body, including excitation of the nerves followed by a sort of paralysis or depression. The stomach and bladder are irritated by caffeine and there is widespread interference in various enzyme systems, damage to the chromosomes of the sex cells and other body cells, and many other unwanted actions.

Just as we have a national drink, we also have a national disease—heart disease—which will account for 53% of the deaths in America this year. Heart disease shows a stronger association with coffee drinking than with obesity, according to a study done by Dr. Ogelsby Paul of Western Electric Corporation.<sup>(1)</sup> Caffeinism is much more important and widespread a disorder than is generally understood. The disease related to caffeine intake involves every organ system, from the nervous system to the skin. Caffeine raises stress hormone levels in the blood, inhibits important enzyme systems having to do with housecleaning in the body, sensitizes nerve receptor sites, and is associated with a sense of poor health, anxiety, and depression.<sup>(2, 3)</sup>

Thousands are in mental institutions today because of no greater matter than that of the use of caffeine. Psychiatrists are now publishing articles indicating that there are numerous cases of depression and anxiety in mental institutions that need no other treatment than to be taken off caffeine.<sup>(4, 5)</sup> It would seem that with such a simple remedy available many thousands of people could be returned to their full usefulness promptly. However, the use of caffeine is so traditional and firmly entrenched that it is almost impossible to remove caffeinated drinks from the dietary of patients in mental institutions. Soft drink machines, coffee dispensers, and the traditional coffee break are common pastimes in mental institutions, and with those who are mentally ill at home.

The first thing that a physician usually mentions to a peptic ulcer patient is that he must leave off caffeinated drinks. Not only peptic ulcer but several other kinds of digestive problems arise from the use of coffee. Many people find that caffeine drinks cause them to suffer diarrhea followed by constipation.

Headaches are common among caffeine users, and often clear up after only a short period of caffeine abstinence—a week or two. Headaches may occur as a caffeine-withdrawal symptom; some people are so sensitive that they get a headache soon after drinking their last cup.

Damage to chromosomes by caffeine has been recognized for years. When LSD was reported to cause chromosomal damage, authorities did not work up much anxiety, because of the fact that LSD is not as potent in producing damage to chromosomes as is caffeine, the drug to which most of our population is addicted. One might ask, “Is such a

common habit a real threat to the population?” It certainly is. A study done in Illinois with 550 couples showed a 13 out of 14 chance of having an unwanted outcome of pregnancy if as much as seven cups of coffee per day are taken by the pregnant woman.<sup>(6)</sup> Long before seven cups had been consumed, coffee was beginning to injure the pregnancy. Those who want good babies and easy pregnancies should use absolutely no caffeine before, during, or after pregnancy, since caffeine can damage the chromosomes of the ova and spermatozoa, as well as the chromosomes of the developing embryo during pregnancy.

Any substance that can damage chromosomes can also cause an increase in the rate of cancer. Bladder cancer in women is 2 and 1/2 times more likely to occur if a woman drinks only one cup of coffee per day.<sup>(7)</sup> There are already several cancers that are known to be more common if one uses caffeine.

Since caffeine first stimulates the nerves then causes depression, the presence of fatigue in those who use caffeinated drinks is common. It is a fact that the commonest complaint in physicians' offices today is that of fatigue. Yet, many people mistakenly believe that coffee helps them get through a difficult day. In addition to fatigue, mental confusion and depression also result from the use of caffeinated drinks. While caffeine drinks cause an immediate increase in the learning ability, the overall result is a decrease in learning; the physical fatigue resulting from pharmacologic depression of the nervous system produces emotional depression, leading to a reduction of interest in and retention of new material. We recommend that all students leave off caffeinated drinks in order to increase learning ability. If caffeine is taken at night, it interferes with the mechanism the brain has of transferring freshly learned material from the short-term memory to the long-term memory. In summary, we can say that the overall effect of caffeine on learning is deleterious.

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