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The Most Common LEGAL Drug in the World

How do you get your fix? **Caffeine** is the most commonly used drug in the world; and it is a central nervous system stimulant drug, which means it speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and the body. Caffeine is found in seeds, nuts and leaves of several different plants that are used in the processing of coffee, tea, cola, cocoa, chocolate, snack bars and energy drinks. Because of this potential for dependency, it is considered addictive. 250-300mg of caffeine per day is considered a moderate amount, which is equivalent to about 3 cups of coffee. The following table shows the average caffeine content of various products:



Product	Average caffeine content (mg/100 ml)
Red Bull®	32.0
Mountain Dew®	15.0
Diet Coke® & Coca Cola®; Coke Zero	9.7*; 9.6*
Brewed black tea; Brewed green tea	22.5; 12.1
Coffee, cappuccino – Espresso	101.9 – 194
Coffee (long black – flat white beans)	74.7 – 86.9

*Adapted from Food Regulation Standing Committee, Caffeine Working Group. (2013). The regulation of caffeine in foods.*The Coca-Cola Company. (2015). Caffeine: Your questions answered.*

Caffeine affects everyone differently based on their size, weight and health; whether the person is used to taking it; whether other drugs are taken around the same time; and the amount taken. It is absorbed and distributed quickly. After absorption, it passes into the brain; it does not accumulate in the blood stream nor is it stored in the body; it is excreted in the urine hours after it has been consumed. The following effects may be experienced between 5-30 minutes after consumption, and may continue for up to 12 hours:

- Feeling more alert and active
- Restlessness, excitability and dizziness
- Anxiety and irritability
- Sleep problems
- Dehydration and need to urinate more often
- Higher body temperature
- Faster breathing and heart rate
- Headache and lack of concentration
- Stomach pain

Light to moderate caffeine consumption does not generally lead to worrisome symptoms, however, overuse can lead to “caffeine intoxication”, especially in small children, if 1g (equal to around 12 energy drinks) is consumed. An overdose of caffeine can cause:

- **Tremors**
- **Nausea & vomiting**
- **Very fast and irregular heart rate**
- **Confusion & panic attack**
- **Seizures**

Giving up caffeine after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. The dependence may be physical or psychological, but the withdrawal symptoms will still occur and usually start within 24 hours after the last dose. These symptoms may include:

- **Headache**
- **Marked fatigue or drowsiness**
- **Dysphoric, depressed mood or irritability**
- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Flu-like symptoms (nausea, vomiting or muscle pain/stiffness)**

So, as with most things in life, caffeine is ok “in moderation”, however, it is very easy to become addicted to a daily stimulating dose. For most people, I included, it is a morning coffee to get the day started. Occasionally, an afternoon pick-me-up in the form of caffeinated tea or another coffee is needed, but not on a regular basis. Some people prefer the sweetness of an energy drink or soda; again, moderation is the key. Caffeine has positives, but it also has negatives when overindulged. Perk up sensibly.



The following website was sourced and referenced for this article:

<https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/caffeine/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/caffeine>

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