

# CAFFEINE ADDICTION

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## Overview

*Caffeine* is a central nervous system stimulant most often found in coffee. Caffeine can sharpen focus, mood, and alertness with occasional use, but regular use can become problematic. Caffeine dependence develops for those who rely on it daily, and many begin as a habit to help improve energy or productivity.

## Physiology of Caffeine Addiction

Sources of caffeine block the function of the receptors for adenosine in the brain. Caffeine inhibits a neurotransmitter that produces relaxation and sleepiness (i.e., you can think of this as acting contrary or stimulating you since it does just the opposite of a neurotransmitter). The brain adapts, and over time, the number of adenosine receptors in the brain increases, so the doses of caffeine required to maintain the same level of alertness and avoid withdrawal symptoms develop dependence (Juliano & Griffiths, 2004).

## Signs and Symptoms

Caffeine dependence is a sensation of withdrawal from caffeine, its use, and symptoms of withdrawal related to this discontinuation. A person with caffeine dependence frequently cannot stop or cut back on caffeine use despite attempting to do so, has serious cravings for caffeine, and experiences headache, fatigue, irritability, and poor concentration when using or taking caffeine is discontinued or reduced. Above 400 mg daily—roughly about four cups of coffee—signals dependence, and with that, the variety of tolerance (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

## How Caffeine Dependence Affects You

Physical and mental health depends on caffeine dependence. High doses of caffeine can also trigger such side effects as increased anxiety, sped-up heart rate, sleeplessness, and digestive problems—according to studies. Increased dependency can result from chronic overuse, and it becomes difficult to function with caffeine, a cycle of increasing use and dependency that, with each cycle, becomes more difficult to overcome.

## Who Are At-Risk?

Some people who develop dependence do so because they have anxiety problems or because they take a great deal of caffeine regularly, are shift workers, or teens who are drinking caffeine to help with school or social performance. Perhaps most critically, genetic variables play a role: some people metabolize caffeine more slowly, increasing sensitivity and danger of dependency.

## When to Seek Medical Attention

However, an individual should seek medical attention if their dependency on caffeine is causing extreme suffering or is keeping them from living a normal life. Withdrawal symptoms can be complex and are especially incriminating. Caffeine-related health problems may include insomnia or anxiety.

## Treatment

Treatment for Caffeine dependency often includes a gradual reduction in caffeine intake rather than rapid discontinuation to reduce the chance of symptom development. Such common behavioral strategies include substituting caffeinated drinks for decaffeinated drinks and structured tapering schedules. For more severe cases, cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, helps manage underlying triggers as well as helps create better means of coping.

- ★ Stopping or reducing caffeine slowly to minimize withdrawal symptoms.
- ★ Using caffeine-free or low-caffeine alternatives (herbal or decaf coffee).
- ★ Schedules to gradually decrease daily intake of the structured tapering.

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