

Caffeine overuse

The holidays are just round the corner and with them comes fun, family andfatigue. So what do most of us do? We get a little extra caffeine. Caffeine can greatly affect your health. It is a potent and quick-acting drug which produces an effect similar to the stress response in our bodies. Caffeine affects each person differently, depending on individual circumstances such as weight, build, etc. It has an almost instant effect on your mind-body which will continue to influence your state for 6-8 hours afterwards. Caffeine stimulates your heart, respiratory system, and central nervous system. Makes your blood more 'sludgy' by raising the level of fatty acids in the blood. Raises blood pressure and causes your stomach to produce more acid which irritates the stomach lining. Makes digestion less effective by relaxing the muscles of your intestinal system. Its diuretic effect causes increased urination. It stimulates the cortex of your brain heightening the intensity of mental activity. This can result in a temporary feeling of alertness and, in the short term, banishes drowsiness and feelings of fatigue. In those who already have high levels of anxiety the heightened intensity of mental activity can produce unpleasant effects. Affects the length and quality of sleep. Heavy caffeine users suffer from sleep-deprivation because their nervous system is too stimulated to allow them deep, restful or prolonged sleep. The American Medical Journal has reported a correlation between caffeine and decreased bone density or osteoporosis in women. Caffeine addiction can involve nervousness, irritability, agitation, headaches or ringing in the ears. You may have a jittery feeling with shaking hands, palpitations, and wobbliness in the legs. It causes your adrenal glands to release their hormones into your bloodstream and causes blood sugar, or blood glucose, to be released from storage through the effects of the adrenal hormones. This gives you a temporary lift but.....requires your pancreas to over-work. This is because your pancreas now has to produce extra insulin to reduce this extra blood sugar. Once the extra insulin has 'mopped up' the extra blood sugar your temporary lift from the caffeine ends. Your vitality level is back to normal. However in heavy caffeine users the pancreas, in time, becomes over-sensitive and over-zealous. Now it begins producing too much insulin – it 'mops up' not just the excess blood sugar but the blood sugar you need to feel alert and energetic. The initial effect of this is a let-down effect and a craving for more caffeine to give you a further boost. A later effect can be excessive and chronic tiredness, even on waking in the morning. Some people find that many of the psychological complaints common to reactive hypoglycemia (the emotional yo-yo effect, shakiness, palpitations, weakness, tiredness, etc.) disappear within a few days of stopping caffeine. The richest sources of caffeine are tea, coffee, cola drinks, some over-the-counter medications, chocolate, and cocoa. An average cup of tea contains around 50 mgs of caffeine. An average cup of instant coffee contains around 70-100 mgs. Instant decaffeinated coffee contains about 3 mgs. A 6 oz cup of espresso coffee (much larger than the normal cafe cup, incidentally) contains about 80-90 mgs. A single-hit cappuccino will contain the same amount. Filter coffee (called 'drip' in the US) can contain 25-50% more caffeine than instant. A 340 ml or 12 oz can of regular or diet cola contains between 35 and 45 mgs. of caffeine depending on the brand. One ounce or 28 grams of chocolate contains about 10-15 mgs. To avoid uncomfortable withdrawal effects it is wise to ease off caffeine over a period of 7-14 days to reduce the discomfort. Reduce and then stop the richest sources (especially coffee) first. It is unwise, particularly if you are a heavy user, to suddenly stop caffeine altogether. Reducing caffeine too quickly can cause a quite dramatic drop in blood pressure, due to the body becoming over-sensitive to adenosine, and this can cause more blood to gather in the head producing a migraine-like headache. Muscle cramps, giddiness, excessive sleepiness, and lack of concentration are other common withdrawal effects from going 'cold turkey' on caffeine. And remind yourself that the drowsiness is a sign that you are allowing your body to get back into a more normal state and that your natural energy levels will soon return once things have got back to normal after the onslaught of the caffeine regime.