

Are the Perks Worth the Price?

by Vicki Griffin

Along with nicotine, caffeine is the most widely-used stimulant in the world. Estimates vary, but approximately 90% of Americans consume caffeine in some form every day. More than half consume over 300 mg of caffeine every day. Most get their caffeine from coffee, although caffeinated soft drink consumption is dramatically increasing.

Regardless of its source, caffeine tolerance and addiction occur quickly. Eight expert substance abuse clinicians randomly sampled 162 caffeine users for clinical measures of dependence and abuse. They found that 91% of the respondents exhibited dependence-like behavior to caffeine, with 56% reporting a “strong desire or unsuccessful attempt to stop” using it. Their results suggest “a substantial proportion of caffeine users exhibit dependence-like behaviors.”

Like typical drugs of abuse, caffeine stimulates the same brain pathways by increasing dopamine in the pleasure centers of the brain — although to a lesser degree. It works on every system of the body effected by the central nervous system. Its chemical action is to block two major braking systems in the body and brain that regulate excitement, wakefulness, and alertness. In short, it blocks adenosine receptors in the brain to make you feel alert, injects stress hormones into the system to induce energy, and manipulates dopamine to make you feel good.

But that quick pick-me-up has its down side. Tolerance and dependence occur quickly, even within days. The long-term effects of repeated caffeine stimulation are fatigue, depression, irritability, mental fog, the jitters, and loss of quality sleep. This leaves you craving more, quickly creating a vicious cycle of dependence. Eating right, exercising, getting plenty of rest, stress management, and drinking plenty of fresh water increase mental strength, overall energy, improve mood and mental processing, and enhance immune function and emotional health.

Caffeine addiction is a form of bondage that begins early in life, usually in the form of soft drinks. The high intake of sugar, phosphoric acid, and caffeine are not good for bones, brain, or body — and addiction is just as real in the young as in older people.

What to do:

Admitting you have a problem is the first step to solving it.

Get help. Beating addiction often requires a full range of medical, spiritual, and social support.

Fight smart. Deal with all addictions. Caffeine reinforces the effects of other drugs. It increases the effects of nicotine. Tobacco use can stimulate cravings for alcohol, and vice versa.

Solomon said a threefold cord is not easily broken. In this case, the threefold cord of alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine forms a noose. But you can be free. According to Paul, the kindness and love of God frees us from being slaves to our passions and pleasures (addictions) by rebirth and renewal through His Spirit.

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