

REDUCING YOUR CAFFEINE INTAKE

This behavior change strategy focuses on one of the most commonly used drugs—caffeine. If you are concerned about your use of a different drug or another type of addictive behavior, you can devise your own plan based on this one and on the steps outlined in your text. However, if an addictive behavior is causing serious problems in your life and/or if you meet the criteria for abuse or dependence, you should seek professional help.

Getting Ready for Change: A Cost-Benefit Analysis

Do you feel ready and committed to change your caffeine consumption? Although your primary surface reason for developing and implementing a behavior change project may be to get a good grade in your wellness course, you're more likely to be successful both now and in the long term if you believe that the benefits of changing outweigh the costs. As an initial step in your program, complete an analysis of the benefits and costs of change for you using the Behavior Change Cost-Benefit Analysis worksheet. Use your analysis to create a list of your major reasons for behavior change—and then post your list in a prominent location.

In your analysis, include the short-term and long-term costs of both your current behavior and your new behavior. For example, your current caffeine use may be a familiar habit but it may also be causing adverse symptoms such as stomach problems and nervousness (see below for more on symptoms of excess caffeine consumption). Because caffeine supports certain behaviors that are characteristic of our culture, such as sedentary, stressful work, you may find yourself relying on coffee (or tea, chocolate, or cola) to get through a busy schedule. Such habits often begin in college. Fortunately, it's easier to break a habit before it becomes entrenched as a lifelong dependency. When you are studying for exams, the forced physical inactivity and the need to concentrate even when fatigued may lead you to overuse caffeine. But caffeine doesn't "help" unless you are already sleepy. And it does not relieve any underlying condition (you are just more tired when it wears off). Your level of wellness may be increased by a reduction in your caffeine consumption and an increase in sleep and physical activity.

In your analysis of the costs and benefits of reducing your caffeine consumption, consider physical and emotional effects on yourself and others. For example, would healthier habits support your self-image, personal values, or personal goals? Is health important to you, and is your current lifestyle supporting that value? Are your caffeine habits influencing others? Has your coffee and cola drinking influenced a friend or housemate to substantially increase his or her caffeine intake?

Gather Data and Establish a Baseline

Once you are ready to make changes in your caffeine habits, begin by tracking your caffeine intake for one to two weeks. Be sure to include all sources of caffeine, such as chocolate bars and over-the-counter medications and supplements, as well as caffeine candy, colas, cocoa or hot chocolate, chocolate cake, tea, and coffee. Estimates of caffeine content (in milligrams) are shown in the figure on the following page.

For information on additional items, visit the Web site for USDA Nutrient Database (www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/cgi-bin/nut_search.pl); the searchable database has caffeine content information on many foods and beverages; scroll to the bottom of the nutrient data page for the particular food.

In keeping your log, consider your serving sizes. Use a measuring cup to measure your portions of coffee or tea, and check the labels of beverages and over-the-counter medications and dietary supplements for information on both serving sizes and caffeine content. Use the Pre-Program Caffeine Intake Log or create your own journal or log page. At the same time that you track your caffeine intake, keep track of the reasons for your caffeine intake (habit, sleepiness, boredom) and note down any caffeine-related effects you are experiencing. Also investigate

your options. For example, what other beverages that you enjoy were available to you over the course of the day? What else could you have done for an afternoon pick-me-up?

Analyze Your Data

Evaluate your caffeine intake by examining your daily logs and determining your typical daily caffeine consumption. Also consider any caffeine-related side effects you experienced. Caffeine affects different people in different ways, so you may experience adverse effects at a higher or lower level of intake than others. How much is too much? At more than 250 mg per day, you may well be experiencing some adverse symptoms. If you are experiencing several of the following symptoms, you may want to cut down.

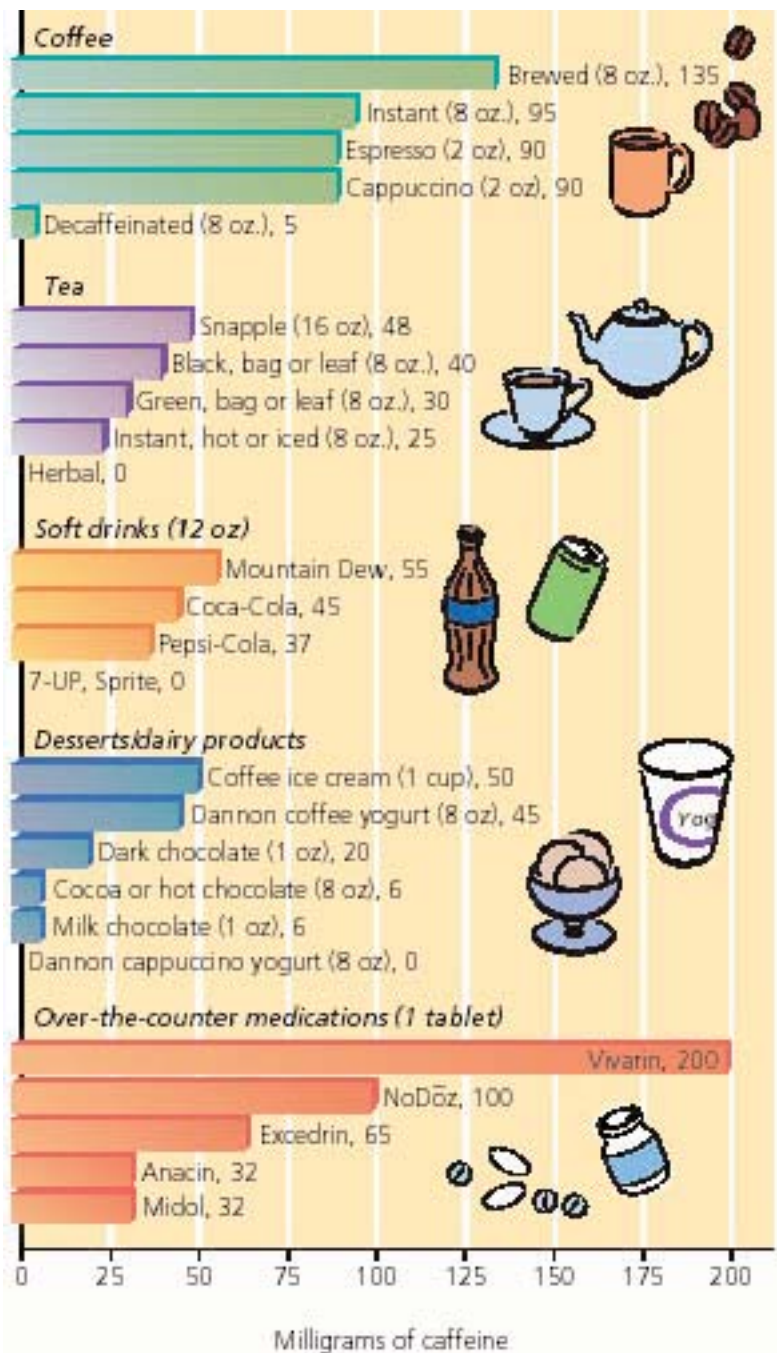
- Restlessness
- Nervousness
- Excitement
- Insomnia
- Flushed face
- Excessive sweating
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Muscle twitching
- Rambling thoughts and speech
- Irregular heartbeat
- Periods of inexhaustibility
- Excessive pacing or movement

Set Goals

Set a specific goal for daily caffeine intake. You might want to set a goal in terms of total milligrams or in terms of a specific number or amount of caffeine-containing beverages and products. For example, you might set a limit of 100 mg of caffeine or of 1 cup of coffee or 2 cups of tea. Pegging your goal for consumption to a specific time of day can be helpful, because then you won't confront a decision at any other point during the day (and possibly fail). Set several mini-goals for your program as well as an overall goal. These interim goals will help you track your progress and give you more opportunities to reward yourself.

Develop Strategies and a Plan for Change

Once you've set your goal, you need to develop strategies that will help you achieve that goal. You may need to make changes both in your beverage and food choices and in your routine. Take a close look at your caffeine logs. What are your reasons for consuming caffeine? Will reducing your intake be a matter of simply changing a habit and ordering decaffeinated coffee in the morning? Or will you need to find the time for a bit more sleep or



other strategies for improving your alertness during long study sessions?

Find Other Ways to Keep Your Energy Up: If you are fatigued, it makes sense to get more sleep or increase physical activity rather than drowning the problem in coffee or tea. Different people need different amounts of sleep; you may also need more sleep at different times, such as during a personal crisis or an illness. Also, exercise raises your metabolic rate for hours afterward—a handy fact to exploit when you want to feel more awake and want to avoid an irritable caffeine jag. And if you’ve been compounding your fatigue by not eating properly, try filling up on complex carbohydrates such as whole-grain bread or crackers instead of candy bars.

Tips on Cutting Out Caffeine: Here are some additional strategies for decreasing your consumption of caffeine.

- Keep some caffeine-free drinks on hand, such as decaffeinated coffee, herbal teas, mineral water, bouillon, or hot water.
- Alternate between hot and very cold liquids.
- Avoid the office or school lunchroom or cafeteria and the chocolate sections of the grocery store. (Often people drink coffee or tea and eat chocolate simply because these items are available.)
- Read labels of over-the-counter medications to check for hidden sources of caffeine.

As a final planning step, develop some rewards for your program—for achieving intermediate and final goals as well as for just sticking with your program. Make a list of your activities and favorite events to use as rewards. They should be special, inexpensive, and preferably unrelated to food or alcohol. You might treat yourself to a concert, a ball game, a new CD, a long-distance phone call to a friend, a day off from studying for a hike in the woods—whatever is meaningful to you. List your rewards on your behavior change contract.

Complete a Contract

The last step before you put your program into action is to make a formal commitment by completing a contract. Your contract should include the following elements:

- Your name
- A statement of your goal, including your current status and target status
- A start date—choose a date in the near future
- A target completion date
- A system of mini-goals and rewards
- A list of your key strategies for reducing caffeine consumption
- A description of the involvement of others—if you plan to have friends or family members involved in your program, describe what they will do
- A place for your signature and, if possible, the signature of a witness—having someone else witness your contract can help make you more likely to stick with your program

You can use the [Behavior Change Contract](#) provided or create your own.

Monitor Your Program

Once your plan is complete, take action. Keep track of your progress by continuing to monitor and evaluate your consumption of caffeine. Use the [Caffeine Intake Program Log](#) or devise your own form. If you find you cannot stick to your limit, you may want to cut out caffeine altogether; abstinence can be easier than moderation for some people. If you experience caffeine withdrawal symptoms (headache, fatigue), you may want to revise your program so that you cut your intake more gradually.

Name _____ Date _____

Behavior Change Cost-Benefit Analysis

Current (target) behavior: _____

New behavior: _____

Short-term benefits of current behavior:

Short-term costs of current behavior:

Long-term benefits of current behavior:

Long-term costs of current behavior:

Short-term benefits of new behavior:

Short-term costs of new behavior:

Long-term benefits of new behavior:

Long-term costs of new behavior:

Key reasons for behavior change: Review your analysis and identify your most important reasons for changing your behavior; post your list of key reasons in a prominent location.

Name _____ Date _____

Behavior Change Contract

(1) I _____ agree to _____
(name) (specify behavior you want to change; include current status)

(2) I will begin on _____ and plan to reach my goal of _____
(start date) (specify final goal)

by _____ .
(final target date)

(3) In order to reach my final goal, I have devised the following schedule of mini-goals. For each step in my program, I will give myself the reward listed.

_____ (mini-goal 1)	_____ (target date)	_____ (reward)
_____ (mini-goal 2)	_____ (target date)	_____ (reward)
_____ (mini-goal 3)	_____ (target date)	_____ (reward)
_____ (mini-goal 4)	_____ (target date)	_____ (reward)
_____ (mini-goal 5)	_____ (target date)	_____ (reward)

My overall reward for reaching my final goal will be _____

(4) I have gathered and analyzed data on my target behavior and have identified the following strategies for changing my behavior:

(5) I will use the following tools to monitor my progress toward reaching my final goal:

(list any charts, graphs, or logs you plan to use)

(6) I have recruited a helper who will witness my contract and _____

(list any way in which your helper will participate in your program)

(continued on following page)

I sign this contract as an indication of my personal commitment to reach my goal.

(your signature)

(date)

(witness's signature)

(date)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT BEHAVIOR CHANGE PROGRAM

