



## Caffeine

In every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called her background risk. This sheet talks about whether exposure to caffeine may increase the risk for birth defects over that background risk. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

### *What is caffeine?*

Caffeine is a stimulant found in many foods and beverages. It is also found in prescription and over the counter medications. Caffeine is a naturally found in the leaves, seeds, and fruits of more than 60 plants.

### *How much caffeine is in common foods and drinks?*

The amount of caffeine in some common items (amounts are approximate and may vary between products):

- 2 tablets of Excedrin® 130mg
- 5 oz. cup of coffee 40-180mg
- 5 oz. brewed tea 20-90mg
- Red Bull® energy drink 67mg
- 1 cup of coffee ice cream 58mg
- 12 oz. Coke® 46mg
- Hershey® chocolate bar 10mg
- 8 oz. hot chocolate 5mg

Some herbals such as guarana also contain caffeine. Beverages made from the guarana seed also contain caffeine.

### *What exactly does caffeine do to my body?*

Caffeine's main effect is making people feel more awake for a short time. Caffeine usually reaches its peak level in the bloodstream about an hour after it has been ingested and remains there for 4-6 hours. Caffeine aids the release of acid in the stomach, which can result in an upset stomach. Caffeine also helps get rid of fluids from the body (a diuretic).

### *I am trying to become pregnant. Is it true that drinking caffeinated beverages will lower my chance to become pregnant?*

Results from studies have been mixed. Some studies have suggested that high levels of caffeine (more than 300mg/day) might make it harder to conceive, but these findings are not proven. Low (less than 300mg/day) to moderate (about 200-300mg/day) caffeine consumption probably does not make it harder for a woman to get pregnant. Some studies have suggested that high levels of caffeine (more than 300mg/day) might make it harder to conceive, but these findings are not proven.

### *I am pregnant. Is it safe for me to continue drinking coffee and soda?*

Most experts agree that low levels of caffeine are okay during pregnancy. It is important for pregnant women to drink enough water, milk and juice. These fluids should not be replaced with caffeinated beverages.

### *Can caffeine cause or make it more likely to have a miscarriage?*

There are many studies that have looked at this question. To date, researchers have not reported an association between low levels of caffeine and an increased risk for miscarriage. Some studies suggest that taking very high levels

(over 800 mg per day) or taking it in high doses with cigarettes or alcohol (both of which are known to increase the risk of miscarriage) may increase the risk for miscarriage.

***Will drinking caffeinated beverages during my pregnancy cause birth defects in my baby?***

No. Large amounts of caffeine have not been shown to cause an increased chance for birth defects.

***I drink 5-6 cups of coffee a day and I am 7 months pregnant. Will this amount of caffeine affect my baby?***

Caffeine crosses the placenta in the later stages of pregnancy. Large amounts of caffeine could affect babies in the same way as it does adults. Some reports suggest that children born to mothers who consumed more than 500mg/day were more likely to have faster heart rates, shaking, increased breathing rate, and spend more time awake in the days following birth.

***Can I drink caffeinated beverages while I breastfeed?***

Caffeine passes into breast milk and it suggested that you limit how much you have. The infant should also be watched for irritability and trouble with sleeping. It's important to keep drinking water, juice and milk while breastfeeding. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about all your options for breastfeeding.

***Is it a problem if the baby's father consumed a lot of caffeine when I became pregnant?***

Very little information is available on the effects of caffeine on sperm. One report stated that caffeine seems to increase the motility (movement) of sperm. In general, a father's exposures do not increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/>.

**References Available by Request.**

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