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go half-caff to start."*

Caffeine conundrum

The truth about coffee in pregnancy

Kimberley Foster



The list of *forbidden items* for *expectant mothers* is long and seems to be lengthening all the time. *Wine. Brie. Sushi.* Still, with some sacrifice, a person *can live without* these treats for nine months; it's a *rare woman* who consumes spicy tuna rolls on a *daily basis*, after all.

But coffee? That's a different story. A lot of us depend on our morning latte to get through the day. Most physicians advise their pregnant patients to cut back on caffeine or consider cutting it out altogether. But when facing nine long months of steady weight gain, insomnia, swollen ankles, and the other delights of pregnancy, it's natural for a mortal woman to ask: coffee, *really?* Do I really have to give up my one little morning pleasure?

EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE

The question is: what does the evidence show, exactly? There is no easy answer, even after reading the latest research. It's known that caffeine readily crosses the placenta, but the exact nature of harm is uncertain. Despite years of research, findings remain conflicting. Even so, there have been some decent studies published recently.

In March 2008 the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* published a study that showed an increased risk of miscarriage with caffeine consumption. They found that the greater a woman's daily consumption, the higher the risk. Women who consumed more than 200 mg of caffeine a day were found to have twice the risk of miscarriage as women who consumed no caffeine.

Moreover, a 2008 study in the *British Medical Journal* linked caffeine intake with fetal growth restriction and low birth weight. The findings of this study suggested an even lower threshold of caffeine consumption, perhaps as low as 100 mg per day. This will clearly need to be studied more in the years to come.

REMAIN WITHIN RECOMMENDATIONS

For now the official recommendation from Health Canada and the US Food and Drug Administration is to limit intake to 300 mg per day. The official UK recommendations cite 200 mg per day as the limit.

While there doesn't appear to be enough evidence from the existing research to recommend a total elimination of caffeine, it does seem wise to cut back and to keep below the recommended thresholds.

Okay, so how do you know how much you're getting? See the sidebar for the caffeine content of various drinks. But keep in mind that much depends on the size of your drink and how strongly it's brewed. Don't forget that tea has caffeine, too. And take note: green tea, with all its apparent health benefits, is not caffeine-free.

CUT BACK THE CAFF

In practical terms, how do you go about cutting back? Interestingly, many women develop a natural aversion to the taste of coffee early in pregnancy. But if you don't fall into this category, how do you curtail your intake? Whatever you do, don't go cold turkey. The withdrawal effects can be unpleasant: headaches and feelings of fatigue and depression. Instead, cut back gradually. Go half-caff to start.

Be careful about substitutions: energy drinks can contain as much, if not more, caffeine as a cup of coffee. And a word of warning about herbal

ADJUST THE JOLT

Beverage	Size (oz)	Caffeine (mg)
Tea, black	8	40-120
Tea, black, decaf	8	2-10
Tea, green	8	30
Coca-Cola Classic or Zero	12	35
7UP (regular or diet)	12	0
Red Bull	8	76

DESIGNER COFFEE TO GO

Beverage	Starbucks 12 oz (tall)	Tim Hortons 10 oz (medium)
Caffeine (mg)		
Coffee	260	100
Coffee, decaf	20	6
Cafe mocha	90	66
Coffee frappuccino/ iced cappuccino	70	120

tea: be mindful of ingredients, as some herbs are not a great idea in pregnancy. Red raspberry leaf, for example, may cause uterine contractions.

So if you're mixing the caffeine, how to get through your day? Let's face it, pregnancy is a time when you could use every little extra bit of energy. Here are some ideas. A simple, but often-ignored piece of advice: get more sleep. No, you don't need to watch yet another episode of *American Idol*—turn off the TV and get to bed earlier. Try adding a little exercise to your routine. There are many benefits to this, of course, and boosted energy is one.

Also, bump up your fluid intake. A woman's need for fluids increases in pregnancy, and mild levels of dehydration can really sap your energy.

As for me, I feel reassured that I can enjoy my one small morning coffee, guilt free. The guilt of motherhood will come later. I have no doubt ... **b**

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