

11-2005

Java Buzz

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Recommended Citation

Craig, Winston J., "Java Buzz" (2005). *Lake Union Herald*. 680.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/680>

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Java BUZZ

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Caffeine is considered a psychoactive drug that can lead to dependency.



We live in a fast-paced society—fast cars, fast computers, and fast food. Anyone who is not pumped may be considered dull or boring. Many people get themselves artificially revved up with the use of caffeine-containing beverages such as coffee, tea, and cola beverages.

About one in five adult Americans consumes over 350 mg of caffeine per day, a level sufficient to produce dependency. A five-ounce cup of coffee contains between 60 and 150 mg of caffeine while a cup of tea has 35 to 60 mg, depending upon the methods of preparation and the strength of the brew. A cola beverage typically contains 30 to 55 mg of caffeine per 12-ounce can, while the new caffeinated beverages such as Surge, Jolt, and Water Joe all contain a little more and are intended to provide a cerebral buzz.

Caffeine produces a cluster of adverse effects.

Caffeine is considered a psychoactive drug since it stimulates the central nervous system and alters mood. Physiological effects may be experienced in adults after as little as one cup of coffee or two cans of cola. Unfortunately, caffeine has a variety of adverse physiological effects. The unnatural stimulation or high of caffeine is normally followed by a low or depression.

Other adverse effects of caffeinated beverages include insomnia and disruption of sleep patterns; tremors, restlessness, and irritability; headaches; elevation of blood pressure and/or serum cholesterol levels; irregular heartbeats and palpitations, and increased risk of cardiac arrhythmia and heart attack; increased gastric acid production, aggravation of peptic ulcers, and increased heartburn; increased symptoms of Pre-

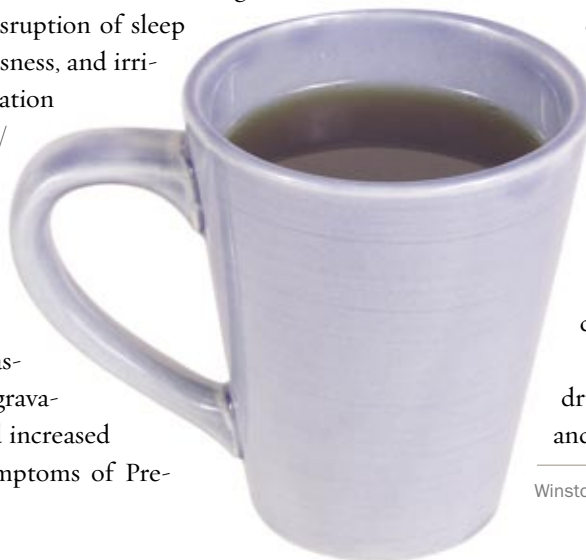
menstrual Syndrome (PMS); increased risk of bladder and rectal cancer; and increased urinary calcium losses.

Drinking one or more cups of coffee per day increases interleukin 6, C-reactive protein, and serum homocysteine levels, all considered risk factors for cardiovascular disease. The use of coffee and tea also reduces iron absorption by 40 to 60 percent, thereby increasing the risk of anemia.

Caffeine causes a worsening of fine motor coordination due to an increase in hand and arm tremors.

Children are drinking excessive amounts of cola beverages and many manifest hyperactive behavior typical of caffeinism. A young child consuming two cans of cola may receive a caffeine jolt equivalent to an adult having eight cups of coffee.

Caffeine is considered an addictive drug. Its regular use can lead to dependency and may lead to the use of stronger drugs.



Winston Craig is professor of nutrition at Andrews University.