

Things We See And Hear

Caffeinated Beverages -Final

Sight accounts for about 75% of all our perceptions. Every structure of the eye is under constant repair and is nourished by extremely fine blood vessels, along with a fluid known as aqueous humor.

This fluid maintains the intraocular, or internal, pressure; and, if impaired, pressure increases, damaging the eye, resulting in a condition known as glaucoma, a major cause of blindness.

Caffeine significantly increases intraocular pressure while, at the same time, decreasing the microcirculation in the eye. Just as in the brain, caffeine markedly constricts vessels, limiting the delivery of oxygen and vital nutrients to the eye.

Reduced circulation to the macula (the central portion of the retina) is the cause of macular degeneration, resulting in vision loss and blindness in those over 65. More than 16,000 new cases are reported each year in the US alone. In addition, the diuretic effects of caffeine can make the eye so dry that wearing contact lenses becomes impossible and potentially hazardous.

Usually, the kidneys help the liver to detoxify a substance, but in the case of caffeine, the liver has to go it alone. As the kidneys try to get rid of the caffeine molecule, it is quickly reabsorbed into the bloodstream before it reaches the urinary tract, placing the burden strictly on the already overworked liver.

Many drugs such as birth control pills, antibiotics, and such medications as Tagamet interfere with the liver's ability to detoxify the chemicals found in coffee. Most of these drugs do not include a warning not to take them with caffeinated beverages but by doing so, the risks of liver disease and cardiac arrhythmias dramatically increase. Some drugs have been shown to raise the blood levels of caffeine by 600%.

With some liver diseases, a single cup of coffee can sustain elevated blood caffeine levels for two to six days. Caffeine is not the only drug with which the liver has to

contend when coffee is ingested. There are the toxic PAH's (also found on barbecued meat), all the aldehydes, alcohols, and sulfides, in addition to the scores of pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides used in the growing. In addition, the imported beans are sprayed again to prevent anything harmful entering the country (US).

Caffeine alone is broken down into more than twenty-five by-products, each having its own chemical effect on the body. To date, over 700 volatile substances have been identified in coffee, including more than 200 acids, a vast number of alcohols, aromatic compounds, carbonyl compounds, esters, hydrocarbons, heterocyclic compounds, and terpenoids.

The body, especially the liver, has to contend with them all. Commercially-grown coffee is the most heavily sprayed crop in the world, next to cotton and tobacco. Some of the most dangerous chemicals known, many of which are banned in the US, are used on the coffee plant.

Brazilian coffee beans have been shown to have low levels of pesticide residuals -- and this is widely advertised. However, what is not included in that information is that tests authorized by the FDA do not include many of these harmful chemicals, and only a small fraction are tested at all.

More sensitive testing has revealed high levels of DDT, BHC, lindane, aldrin, and chlordane, all known carcinogens. Contrary to popular belief, many of these residuals are not destroyed during roasting. Brands of

the same type of product can contain caffeine or be caffeine-free; and, as of March 1998, the FDA was still reluctant to force companies to label caffeine.

For example:1) Dannon Light Coffee Yogurt has as much caffeine as a 12-oz. Can of Coca-Cola. Dannon Light Cappuccino Yogurt, however, is caffeine-free.

2) Sunkist Orange Soda has more caffeine than Pepsi, but Minute Maid Orange Soda has no caffeine.

3) Some brands of root beer contain significant amounts of caffeine, while others do not.

4) Coffee ice cream can have as much as 40 mg. of caffeine per serving.

Caffeine is showing up in more and more foods without benefit of labelling. This revelation is the result of work done by the CSPI (Center for Science in the Public Interest), plus ten other health and consumer groups and thirty-four scientists from such institutions as Johns Hopkins, Yale, Harvard, Duke, U of Michigan, U of California at Berkeley, and others.

Herbal sources of caffeine are becoming popular. Gaurana is a South American herb popularized in "energy-type" drinks and in supplements said to enhance sex drive, mental acuity, and stamina. In reality, it contains more caffeine than coffee; and it is the caffeine producing these short-lived effects. Some manufacturers are hiding caffeine under such botanical names as Ilex paraguayensis or Paulinia cupana. The chemical name for caffeine -- trimethylxanthine -- is also used.

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