

Quick
AND Dirty
Tips

NUTRITION DIVA PRESENTS

NUTRITION ZOMBIES

**10 NUTRITION
MYTHS THAT
REFUSE TO DIE**

**(AND HOW TO KEEP THEM
FROM SABOTAGING YOUR DIET)**

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Myth #1

Caffeine Is Bad for You

Ever notice that smug look people get when they tell you they don't "do" caffeine?

Well, I'm here to tell you, there's no need to feel sheepish about enjoying coffee or tea. In fact, the caffeinated may have the last laugh. Both coffee and caffeine have a lot of positive health benefits and many of the harmful effects attributed to caffeine are actually myths. Here are some of the most common ones:

Myth #1: Coffee or caffeine increases breast pain or tenderness, causes benign breast lumps, or even increases your risk for breast cancer.

Some women who have breast pain or tenderness swear that their symptoms improve when they stop drinking coffee or caffeine. But research shows that breast pain is just as likely to disappear when women continue drinking coffee as when they give it up. Similarly, extensive clinical research has found no link between coffee and breast cancer or benign breast lumps.

Myth #2: Caffeine weakens your bones.

It's true that when you take in more caffeine, you tend to lose more calcium in your urine. But you needn't worry that this robs your bones of needed calcium. Your body compensates for these losses by increasing the amount of calcium that it absorbs from the foods you eat. As long as your diet contains enough calcium and other bone-building minerals, coffee consumption has little to no long-term effect on bone health or osteoporosis risk.

Myth #3: Drinking coffee wears out your adrenal gland.

It's true that caffeine stimulates the production of cortisol by the adrenal glands. The rise in cortisol is usually mild, temporary, and harmless. However, this effect can be exaggerated in people who are under a lot of stress. Having a lot of cortisol coursing through your body all the time doesn't feel good—and isn't particularly good for you either. If you're under extraordinary stress, cutting out caffeine may help mitigate the damage, but finding effective ways to reduce or manage your stress will help even more. Rest assured, however, that neither sustained stress nor coffee consumption will cause your adrenal gland to stop functioning.

Myth #4: Caffeine or coffee is bad for your heart.

Some studies have found that drinking unfiltered coffee—such as French press or percolated coffee—elevates cholesterol. It appears to be volatile oils in the coffee rather than caffeine that affect cholesterol, and only in men. However, coffee drinkers are no more likely to develop heart disease than non-coffee drinkers. Caffeine also temporarily elevates your blood pressure but does not raise your risk of having a stroke. In fact, coffee consumption appears to slightly reduce your risk of a stroke. Similarly, caffeine temporarily increases your heart rate but does not cause arrhythmia.

As it turns out, the bad news about caffeine isn't really so bad. Now, let's take a look at the good news:

Benefit #1: Caffeine boosts mental performance.

Caffeine doesn't make you any smarter, but it does make you more alert and boosts your ability to concentrate, which can make you a better test taker as well as a better driver. Note that caffeine is not an antidote to liquor, however. If you or one of your guests has had too much to drink, having a cup or two of coffee won't make you (or them) fit to drive. You're far better off skipping the coffee and sleeping it off instead. If you wake up the next morning with a headache, however, caffeine can help treat that. In fact, the popular headache medicine Excedrin contains as much caffeine as a big cup of coffee.

Benefit #2: Caffeine lowers your risk for several common diseases.

Not only does caffeine stimulate the brain and central nervous system, but it appears to protect them as well. People who drink coffee every day have a significantly lower risk of developing Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. The protective benefits extend beyond the brain, too. Coffee drinkers also enjoy lower rates of diabetes, gallstones, and colon and endometrial cancers. Caffeine doesn't get all the credit. Coffee contains a lot of volatile compounds and antioxidants that may have beneficial effects by themselves, or in combination with caffeine. For example, drinking tea doesn't seem to reduce your risk of diabetes, even though tea contains caffeine. On the other hand, people who drink decaffeinated coffee do have a reduced risk, but decaf seems to work only about half as well as caffeinated coffee.

Benefit #3: Caffeine boosts athletic performance.

Caffeine also enhances athletic performance. In fact, up until recently, caffeine was considered a performance-enhancing drug by the International Olympic Committee, and athletes had to keep their intake of caffeinated beverages fairly low to pass their drug screens. Unlike the case with most performance-enhancing drugs, you can safely

try this one at home. Have a cup or two of coffee one hour before your workout and you may be able to go a bit faster, stronger, and longer.

What Are the Downsides of Caffeine?

There are some legitimate downsides of caffeine, but they are relatively minor. Some people find that too much caffeine makes them jittery, anxious, or disrupts their sleep. How many cups of coffee it takes to make your hair stand on end or how late in the day you can drink a cup of coffee without staring at the ceiling all night is subject to a high degree of individual variation.

If you drink coffee or other caffeinated beverages regularly, you're much less likely to experience any negative side effects from caffeine. That's because caffeine is highly habituating. Some might even say it's addictive, although that judgment seems a little harsh. The biggest problem with being habituated to caffeine is that you might feel a little sleepy or headachy if you suddenly swear off it. These withdrawal symptoms are harmless and usually last only a few days. Or you can make it easier on yourself by tapering off your consumption over the course of a few weeks.

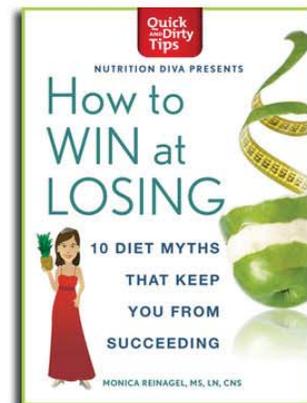
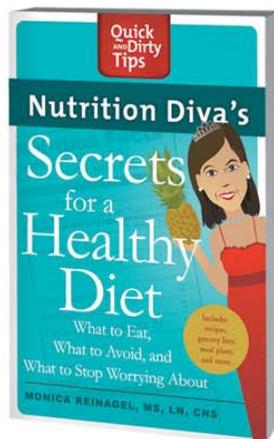
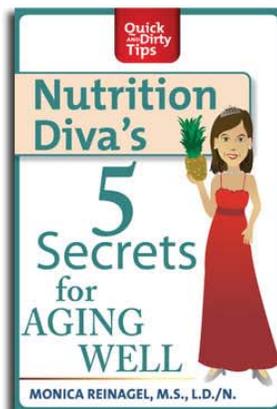
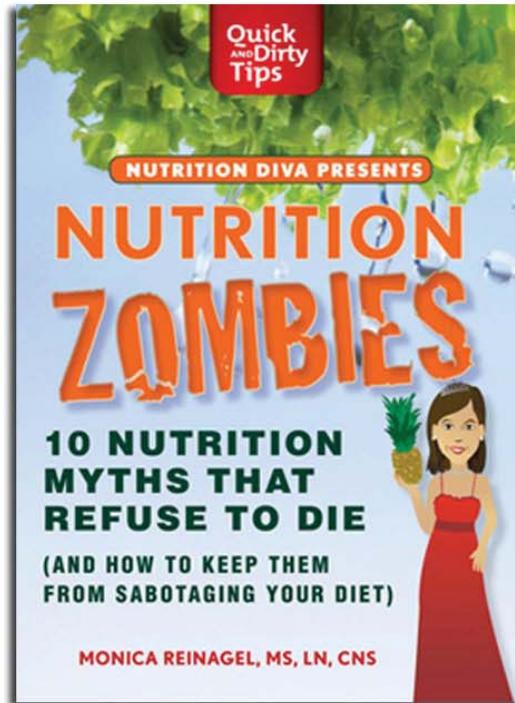
A Few Reasons to Avoid Caffeine

People who are very sensitive to stimulants are usually better off avoiding caffeine altogether. In addition, caffeine does appear to negatively affect the growth and development of babies in the womb, so it's also not advised for pregnant women.

The Bottom Line on Caffeine

For most people, moderate consumption of caffeine appears to have a lot of benefits and limited disadvantages. The benefits of caffeine start kicking in when you consume a cup of coffee or several cups of black tea every day. The positive effects really start piling up when you drink three or four cups of coffee a day or the equivalent amount of tea. I don't suggest going much higher than that. (Of course, if that much caffeine makes you feel wiggly, it's best to stick with your comfort level.)

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