

CAFFEINE

Description

Caffeine is a mild stimulant found in Tea, Coffee, Soft drinks, Energy Drinks (Red Bull etc.) Over The Counter Analgesics, Headache Pills, Pep Pills and Chocolate.

Routes of Use

Ingestion, Oral

History

Caffeine is one of the world's most widely used drugs. Some people believe that it may date back to the Stone Age. Earliest use of tea was probably in China before the 10 century BC. Coffee use is much more recent, with the first record of it's cultivation in Arabia in around 675 AD. Tea was first imported in to Europe in around 1600 and come to the UK in the 1660's. Coffee was first introduced to the UK as a medicine, but became a fashionable drink in the 1670's.

Effects People Seek

Taken in moderate doses, Caffeine stimulates the body, increasing the heart rate and blood pressure. It also combats tiredness and drowsiness and can make people feel alert and aid concentration. Many people feel they cannot function properly in a morning until they have had a cup of tea or coffee. People also drink tea and coffee to help them relax and feel sociable. Larger doses can sometimes impair performance and increase the level of anxiety, restlessness, insomnia and an increase in sensory disturbances (ringing in the ears or light flashes). There have also been concerns about the amount of caffeine consumed by children and young people as some people have suggested it can cause them to become hyper active.

Other Effects

Consuming 500mg – 600mg of caffeine per day (around 6 – 8 cups of instant coffee) is considered excessive and can have adverse effects. Long term heavy use may cause kidney, bladder, heart problems and peptic ulcers. Death from overdose is possible, but would take around 100 cups of coffee.

Dependence & Tolerance

Research in to the long term effects of caffeine are inconclusive, although it is thought that people who regularly drink more than 6 – 8 cups of normal strength tea or coffee a day usually become dependant and may find it difficult to stop using. Tolerance can develop to the physiological effects of caffeine for many that regularly use caffeine, (but not all) and there is a well-established withdrawal syndrome.

The Law

There are no legal restrictions on the sale or use of coffee, tea, cocoa, soft drinks and chocolate confectionery. Some medicines, which contain caffeine, may only be available on a doctor's prescription.