

Coffee withdrawal symptoms? ^[1]

Hi Alice,

Been reading your site for a while and wanted to first thank you for an excellent site! So anyway, here's the question:

I've been having headaches off and on for the past year and noticed that it seems to coincide with days that I don't drink coffee in the morning. I've heard of becoming "addicted" to caffeine, so I decided I should just go ahead and quit for a while. This past week, I cut out coffee and all caffeine-related products from my diet, and have been suffering from pounding headaches every day. Today (six days from my last cup of coffee) is the first day that I don't seem to have a headache. Is this common? And also, any ideas on what will happen if I do have some coffee? Will my system require coffee every day again (at the sake of a pounding headache)? I'm completely clueless on this, and I love coffee, so any advice would be helpful.

— de-caffeinated and hating it

Answer

Dear de-caffeinated and hating it,

Headaches are a normal response to an abrupt and drastic cut in the supply of caffeine to the system. If you drink lots of coffee, or somehow provide your body with a steady, high supply of caffeine, with time, your body will develop a tolerance to caffeine. When you deprive your body of the caffeine it has grown accustomed to, it struggles to cope with this sudden change. In the coping process, you end up with a pounding headache. Headaches, irritability, lethargy, nervousness, and mild depression are all fairly common withdrawal symptoms associated with caffeine intake. As you have experienced, withdrawal symptoms from cutting caffeine from your routine typically go away after several days.

Withdrawal symptoms from a caffeine "detox" are nowhere near as severe as symptoms of withdrawal from other drugs. Although it does produce physical dependence, most of us would not identify caffeine as a dependency-producing drug. For more information on caffeine specifically, you can check out [Long-term effects of caffeine-based drugs](#) [2] in the *Go Ask Alice! Alcohol & Other Drugs* [3] archives.

As for your other issue, it's not a question of "if I do have some coffee...?" — rather, it's one of "can I have some coffee without having some more, and then maybe one more cup for the road?" It's possible to drink a cup of coffee every now and then, or even one a day, without developing such a strong tolerance that your headaches come back to haunt you on your first coffeeless morning. The key here is moderation. It's also good to be aware of the caffeine content of other beverages you drink, primarily teas and sodas. Make sure you're not substituting one form of caffeine for another. For more information, see [Caffeine content](#) [4].

If you really can't live without coffee, drink one cup of full strength and then switch to decaf for the rest of the day. Or, make your pots half-decaf and half-caff, and use premium coffee roasts, such as French Roast, Viennese, and Yukon Gold... get the aroma?

Bottoms up!

Alice!

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