



THE MEDICAL MINUTE
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“I need my morning coffee”

80% of coffee drinkers are addicted to caffeine.

Our culture approves and encourages coffee use. It is a Vancouver epidemic. Most coffee drinkers are unaware that they are addicted to a drug. If you drink one or more cups of coffee daily, you may be experiencing some of the symptoms of addiction. “I need my morning coffee”. The morning coffee energizes but soon leads to afternoon lethargy and if taken later in the day contributes to insomnia.

When the daily coffee drinker stops for 24 hours, the body reacts with symptoms of withdrawal: lethargy, irritability, nausea and headaches. My medical practice is full of coffee addicts: the 47 year old financial analyst with chronic headaches, the female lawyer with frequent urination despite no infection, the 25 year old secretary experiencing panic attacks, the IT specialist with high blood pressure and heart palpitations.

It is advisable to avoid coffee if you have any of the following conditions: anxiety, insomnia, heartburn, headaches, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, urinary tract disorders, prostate problems, PMS, fibrocystic breasts, tremors, and epilepsy. Pregnant women should be aware that coffee may increase the risk of miscarriage. Decaffeinated coffee also has side effects due to trace amounts of caffeine and other active substances.

The good news is that there are a number of healthier alternatives to the morning cup of coffee and that coffee addiction is easy to break compared to alcohol or tobacco. It is also important to be aware of other caffeine containing drinks and foods such as soft drinks, teas and chocolate.

Before you attempt to quit coffee be prepared to put up with three days of headaches, fatigue and irritability.

Dr Stein’s advice: Keep a journal and note how you feel caffeine-free for two months in order to understand the effects that caffeine may have had on your own body. Wait for the positive results and the return of your natural energy supply. If symptoms persist see your doctor.