

Caffeine

It could be affecting your bladder



Information for patients

Continence Service



What is caffeine?

Most of us will take in some caffeine on most days. Caffeine is a bitter substance found naturally in coffee, tea and chocolate. It is added to drinks such as cola, and some 'energy drinks'. A number of medicines also contain caffeine; these include some cough and cold remedies and some painkillers such as paracetamol.

The effect of caffeine on your metabolism

Caffeine has many effects on the body's metabolism, including stimulating the central nervous system. This can make you more alert and give you a boost of energy. It may also lead to:

- restlessness
- nervousness
- excitement
- insomnia
- flushing of the face
- gastrointestinal problems
- muscle twitching
- rambling flow of thought and speech
- irritability
- irregular or rapid heart beat.

The effect of caffeine on your bladder

Caffeine can act as a diuretic. This makes your kidneys produce more urine, so your bladder fills up more quickly and you need to pass urine more frequently. It is also possible for some drinks to irritate your bladder muscle and cause a sudden need to pass urine urgently. These drinks may include citrus fruit juices, such as orange juice, and drinks that contain artificial sweeteners.

Drinking alcohol can make you less aware of when you need to pass urine which may lead to leakage.

Caffeine may affect your sleep. You may not sleep as long or as deeply, making you more likely to wake up and need to go to the toilet.

Caffeine and cystitis

Caffeine can be an irritant for cystitis. This is because it is a central nervous system stimulant; it stimulates spasm in sensitive nerves supplying the bladder muscle.

The acidity of both regular and decaffeinated coffee can be highly irritating to the bladder, and can contribute to the conditions that lead to cystitis. For people who have interstitial cystitis (IC), drinking just one cup of coffee, even decaffeinated coffee, can trigger hours of pain and agonising trips to the bathroom.

The effect of caffeine on your bowels

Caffeine relaxes the internal anal sphincter muscle which helps to close off the rectum, to maintain bowel continence. It should therefore be reduced or avoided by those with bowel urgency or incontinence.

Calculating your daily caffeine intake

As a rough guide:

- One cup (150ml) of instant coffee contains 108mg
- One cup (150ml) of instant decaf coffee contains 1.5mg
- One cup of tea (150ml) contains 50mg
- One 55g chocolate bar contains 12mg
- One can of cola (330ml) contains 45mg
- One can of 'energy drink' (250ml) contains 80mg

Cutting back

If you feel that caffeine could be affecting your bladder or bowel, then you may want to cut back. Consuming as little as 100mg of caffeine a day can lead a person to become dependent on caffeine. The best way is to cut back slowly, otherwise you could get headaches and feel tired or irritable. Your energy levels will return to normal in a few days. Caffeine is not stored in the body, but you may feel its effects for up to 6 hours.

Try reducing your intake of caffeine by replacing caffeinated drinks with non-caffeinated drinks. It may be helpful for you to keep track of how many caffeinated drinks you have each day, and substitute one drink per day with a caffeine-free alternative, until you have reduced your caffeine below the 100mg mark or cut out caffeine completely.

You could also cut down the amount of caffeine in a cup of tea by reducing the time taken to brew the tea. The amount of caffeine in a cup of tea increases the longer that the tea is being brewed.

Check the caffeine content in any over-the-counter medications you are taking and ask for caffeine-free versions, if available.

The aim is to reduce your caffeine intake, or preferably cut it out completely. This may help improve your bladder control and improve or stop your urine leakage.

Alternative formats can be available on request.

Please email: sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net

© Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust 2022

Re-use of all or any part of this document is governed by copyright and the "Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005" SI 2005 No. 1515. Information on re-use can be obtained from the Information Governance Department, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Email sth.infogov@nhs.net