

Trouble Brewing

The buzz on caffeine and kids

by MADELEINE GREY

Leora Rogovein enjoys the occasional Frappuccino. The 11-year-old Torontonian says she drinks it because it's "yummy," not because she wants to "get hyper."

But that's not true for all kids. Several of my son's classmates were knocking back Jolt cola in grade six for that very reason. "Twice the caffeine" reads the label, along with a kid-friendly graphic showing a can of Jolt beside a cup of coffee with a big equal sign in between. They get the picture.

Many of the under-10 set are getting caffeinated too. Maria Marotta of Clarendon, Ont., says she started her three daughters (now all teenagers) on espresso when they were about six years old. "It was a little bit of espresso with a lot of milk," says this Italian-Canadian mother who was introduced to coffee much the same way as a child.

Caffeine abounds. It's in coffee, tea, pop, chocolate and other food and drinks enjoyed by both adults and kids. Yet caffeine is a drug — a readily available stimulant — and many parents wonder if it's safe for children.

Health Canada says it is, albeit in moderation (see "Dose of Truth," p. 58). The problem is, we can't really rely on labels when it comes to tallying levels of caffeine. It is not listed on Nutrition Facts panels because it isn't a nutrient. Food labelling laws do not require a can of Coke or a pouch of instant hot chocolate to list the amount of caffeine. If the stuff is added to a product, it must appear in the ingredients list: Pick up a can of Dr Pepper and you'll see it printed there. But if it occurs naturally in a food or beverage,



The Dish on Portions	
calories	148
protein	5.4 g
fat	4.9 g
carbohydrates	21.5 g
calcium	17%*
vitamin B ₁₂	28%*
vitamin B ₂	19%*
vitamin A	11%*

*of recommended daily amount

Frosty Moccaccino

This is treat time in a glass, teeming with calcium and totally decaf.

- 1 tbsp** (15 mL) **instant decaffeinated coffee**
- ¼ cup** (50 mL) **boiling water**
- 2 cups** (500 mL) **1% chocolate milk**
- 1 cup** (250 mL) **vanilla ice cream**
- 1 cup** (250 mL) **ice cubes (about 5)**
- ½ tsp** (2 mL) **cocoa (optional)**

In a small bowl, combine coffee and water. Let cool 10 minutes. In a blender, add chocolate milk, ice cream and ice cubes. Blend until smooth and icy. Serve immediately, with a little bit of cocoa sprinkled through a small sieve (or placed in an empty salt shaker).

Makes 4 servings.

Our recipe tester, Adell Shneer, tests Nutrition using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.

it won't be listed. So, it's absent from the ingredients list for a can of iced tea or a package of chocolate brownies.

HIDDEN HITS

"In the past, we used to tell parents that dark colas contain caffeine," says Sydney, NS, dietitian Jan McCabe. "It was an easy identifier." But with the advent of drinks like Mountain Dew Energy (a 20 oz bottle packs 91 mg of caffeine) "the picture gets cloudy," she says.

Enter energy drinks to really mix up the brew. Beverages like Red Bull (80 mg of caffeine in an 8 oz can) are available in corner and variety stores. "Teachers report to us they're seeing energy drinks in elementary schools and junior highs," says McCabe. At the same time, she's spotting more and more adolescents drinking frozen coffee drinks and thinks parents "don't really consider those drinks as *coffee*."

Should parents be concerned? McCabe thinks so. Caffeinated drinks, she says, are taking the place of more nutritious choices. Instead of caffeinated pop (high in sugar and devoid of nutrients) and frozen coffee drinks (high in sugar, fat and sometimes even trans fats), kids need beverages high in calcium and other nutrients. Research has shown that the risk to bone health is greatest when milk is displaced for caffeinated beverages. Caffeine can increase calcium loss (through excretion), but drinking milk can offset those losses.

BODY OF TROUBLE

There are also health implications. "Caffeine is not just an ingredient,"

What's Guarana?

Guarana is added to some soft drinks and energy drinks. If it's added, it must be listed under ingredients. Guarana comes from the seeds of a Brazilian plant and is a natural source of caffeine.

says Halifax dietitian Pam Lynch, "it's a stimulant. When you put that drug into a smaller body, it may react more strongly depending on the dose."

"Children develop at different rates," says Massimo Marcone, a University of Guelph food scientist, "and safe caffeine intake has more to do with body weight than it does with age. A child with lower-than-average body weight can consume less than the recommended limit, but still experience adverse effects. Some children are more sensitive to caffeine and some are more tolerant."

According to Marcone, when kids go over Health Canada's recommended levels of caffeine, several things can happen:

- their hearts can start to race;
- they may have trouble sleeping (which can cause daytime behavioural problems);
- if they consume a lot of caffeine at school, they may become distracted.

And there are other health concerns. Caffeine is a known appetite suppressant (it's found in diet medications), worth noting in these days of adolescent eating disorders. It's also a diuretic. Kids can get dehydrated consuming a lot of it. Whether you call caffeine addictive or habit forming, studies do show that children can experience the classic headaches associated with caffeine withdrawal.

Still, Marotta says her daughters display no side effects. "Are they jittery after an iced cappuccino? No! Does a chocolate snack before bedtime keep them up at night? No!" But in the same breath, Marotta will emphasize that espresso has less caffeine than regular brewed coffee and whenever she serves it to her children, "it is loaded down with milk."

And therein lies the difference: A hint of chocolate or coffee to give milk more kid appeal is a far cry from energy drinks or highly caffeinated pops. So use caffeine to sell more solid nutritional choices. And when in doubt, go for decaf. ♥

Dose of Truth

CAFFEINE NUMBERS

Recommended maximum caffeine intake levels for children are:

4 to 6 years	45 mg/day
7 to 9 years	62.5 mg/day
10 to 12 years	85 mg/day

TRANSLATION

Coffee

6 oz coffee (filter drip)	108–180 mg
1 shot espresso	35 mg
10 oz Tim Hortons Iced Cappuccino	87 mg
Dairy Queen MooLatte	35 mg

Tea

6 oz weak	18–24 mg
6 oz strong	78–108 mg
8 oz iced tea (homemade or bottled instant)	5–45 mg

Pop

12 oz cola (diet included)	34–45 mg
12 oz Jolt cola	71.2 mg
20 oz Mountain Dew Energy	91 mg

(Some root beers contain caffeine; others don't. Dr Pepper has caffeine; Sprite, 7-Up, Orange Crush and ginger ale do not. President's Choice Mountain Mania contains guarana.)

Energy drinks

8 oz Red Bull	80 mg
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Chocolate

8 oz chocolate milk	8 mg
envelope hot-cocoa mix	5 mg
1 oz milk chocolate	7 mg
1 oz baking chocolate (dark)	25–58 mg
1½ oz chocolate brownie	10 mg
5 oz chocolate pudding	9 mg

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