

Morning Pick-Me-Up or Daily Grind? The Effect of Caffeine on Migraines

Caffeine can help treat migraine headaches. Patients often report that coffee or soda helps reduce head pain. Caffeine is also a common ingredient in over-the-counter headache medicines. Many patients note that medicines with caffeine are more helpful than those without. However, caffeine is a drug, and like many other drugs, it can cause problems when overused. Caffeine can be useful when used infrequently, but using it daily can lead to medication overuse headaches, which are also known as “rebound” headaches. Using more than 100 mg of caffeine (either in medicines or in beverages) daily (about the amount in one 8oz cup of coffee) is a known risk factor for developing daily headache.

Some suggestions for caffeine use in migraine patients:

- Episodic migraine patients should limit caffeine intake to 1-2 beverages daily (or ~200mg caffeine).
- Patients with daily headaches should consider avoiding caffeine completely.
- Limit use of caffeine containing medications to no more than 2 days a week.
- Reduce caffeine intake slowly, by 25% each week, to avoid caffeine withdrawal symptoms.
- The amount of caffeine in different brands and types of coffee varies widely, from 133mg of caffeine in a large McDonald’s brew to 415mg in a venti Starbucks. The same is true for different medicines. Consider using an online calculator or talking to your doctor when figuring out your daily caffeine use.
- Caffeine is probably not the only cause of frequent migraines, but reducing caffeine will often help improve headache.



Scher AI, Stewart WF, Lipton RB. [Caffeine as a risk factor for chronic daily headache: a population-based study](#). *Neurology*. 2004; 63(11):2022-27.

Caffeine Content of Food & Drugs. (November 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.cspinet.org/new/cafchart.htm> on December 7, 2015.