



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Podcast Episode 71 – Nicotine, Caffeine, and Your Health

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Destanie: Welcome back to this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. If you listened to part one, you know we started an important conversation about caffeine, nicotine, and the effects they can have on our health. And if you missed part one, don't worry. You can go back and give it a listen. But today, we're picking up right where we left off with our hosts, Wendy and Brenda, continuing the conversation with Dr. Lu and diving a little deeper into caffeine, nicotine, energy drinks, and what we should know to make informed choices about our health. So, grab your coffee, settle in, and let's get into part two.

Wendy: And the FDA says that up to about four hundred milligrams of caffeine per day is generally not associated with the negative effects for most healthy adults. Why is it important to remember that this is a general guideline and not necessarily the right amount for everyone?

Dr. Lu: Right. So, as we've already mentioned a few times, it really depends on your kind of baseline status. And so, if you already have certain medical conditions where you may be more... Either more sensitive to the stimulants or the effects of the stimulants are more harmful to you, then those would be people where we would recommend lower doses of the caffeine. So again, broadly speaking, at least certain heart conditions, you know, anyone who's already had a heart attack, struggling to control their high blood pressure, people who have certainly arrhythmias, where they have an abnormal rhythm of the heart.

Dr. Lu: Too much caffeine can definitely cause them to go into that abnormal rhythm either more often, depending on what it is, or maybe more extreme, more severe, more persistent. And then we talked about that the lunch and learn recently, for the babies, you know, for pregnant women. That's why they limit that because the caffeine crosses the placental barrier and affects the fetus. And, of course, this tiny little fetus is much more sensitive to caffeine than a full-grown adult. And so, of course, then pregnant people, they went to limit the intake for them as well.

Brenda: And how does the caffeine affect sleep, and how can the caffeine... How long does it actually stay active in the body?

Dr. Lu: Good question. So, the caffeine, of course, makes us more alert... More awake. So that is why it's counterproductive to sleep. Most of us drink it first thing in the morning or first thing when you wake up. So, again, you just don't wanna take it too late. Now how late is too late?



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That just varies by the person. You know, some people are very sensitive to caffeine, and they can... I have a good friend of mine and my wife; they're both super sensitive. If they even have tea in the afternoon, they can't sleep at night for, like, an hour or two. If they have even just a little, like, decaf coffee, like, around dinner time, they're, like, that's not good for them. They're gonna be up really late.

Dr. Lu: But for some people like me, I drink coffee, you know, around eight, nine just because I wanna work a little longer or do other stuff a little longer. Doesn't bother me at all. So, it varies. But, in the lunch and learn that I presented, they say that it lasts roughly about five-ish hours on average. But, again, that doesn't mean it's full strength. Right? So, again, some people may be able to fall asleep as it's waning down. And some people might... they might last much longer, like my wife and my friend, for maybe it's, like, eight to twelve hours. You know? So.

Dr. Lu: Alright. Now, since we've been talking about caffeine and coffee so much, I thought it'd be a helpful bonus if we could go over the caffeine content of various beverages, a lot of which caffeine users consume. Just so you have a rough idea of how many milligrams of caffeine is it. Right? Because we're talking about four hundred milligrams max, generally recommended for non-pregnant and people without other medical conditions. So, to start with, kind of on the low end is cola. So, like any kind of cola soda, generally going to be somewhere thirty and forty-five-ish milligrams of caffeine. And tea is kind of there; there's a wide variety of teas. That green tea is usually the plain green tea is the lowest caffeine content, around 28 or 30 milligrams of caffeine for an eight-ounce cup.

Dr. Lu: And then, the matcha that's become more popular is much higher, about seventy milligrams. And then black teas, even, also, it depends on which one, but around 50-ish milligrams. So, it just kinda varies, and that's all based on eight ounces. Now the next beverage as well is, like, your typical coffee. So an eight-ounce cup of brewed coffee, again, depends on which brew and how you brew it, but maybe around upper nineties. I've seen even up to 200 milligrams of caffeine. And surprisingly, one shot of espresso is actually less than one cup of coffee. So, a single shot of espresso is only about sixty-three milligrams of caffeine. And so, really, even a double shot is only a 120, so that's equal to a lot of eight-ounce cups of coffee.

Dr. Lu: And then the other surprising thing is that cold brew 16 ounces is about 200 milligrams of coffee or... Sorry, caffeine. So, it's supposed to be a higher content. And then lastly are the energy drinks, and those really vary. Again, I always tell people we have to look at the caffeine content. It's always in tiny, tiny print, usually just a single line under the nutrition facts label, and it ranges anywhere from a hundred some milligrams all the way up to three hundred milligrams of caffeine per can. And, of course, the can size varies too, but all that matters really is the overall total milligrams of caffeine within that can. So that gives you a rough idea.



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Dr. Lu: So, choose wisely. And, of course, if you start feeling symptoms, it doesn't matter what the number is. You need to lower your intake.

Brenda: Let's bring these two together. A lot of people who use nicotine also drink coffee. They drink energy drinks. Is there anything employees should know about combining these two stimulants?

Dr. Lu: Yes. So, actually, the funny thing is we were talking about in the lunch alone that, actually, when you take them together, the effect is actually lessened. It changes the metabolism. And so even though people do that a lot, the caffeine actually doesn't last as long when you're smoking along with it. So... But they're also both stimulants, so maybe that's why it's not as noticeable because they're getting double stimulants, basically. But also because they're double stimulants, I mean, again, I see that with patients who are like, Oh, yeah, doc. I just had my morning coffee and my cigarette right before coming in here, and, you know, blood pressure and pulse again. It's super high. I'm like, yeah. Don't do that next time. And, of course, when they come in, they haven't done that. It's normal. And I always point out, we'll see what that does to your blood pressure and pulse.

Brenda: Are there certain people who should be particularly cautious about their caffeine and nicotine intake because of their existing health conditions or maybe the medications that they're taking?

Dr. Lu: Yes. So, you know, again, broadly speaking, if you have a lot of heart conditions, really wanna be protective of that because the stimulants do increase the heart rate. Also, anything that's sensitive to the blood pressure can also be effective because it can raise your blood pressure. So really any of the... Anything of those categories, you really wanna limit the caffeine intake because they are stimulants, and that's what they do. They cause the vasoconstriction, which raises the blood pressure, and then they also, you know, increase the heart rate as well.

Wendy: And for someone who wants to quit nicotine, where's the best place to start?

Dr. Lu: Right at our clinic. Come on down. We have the tobacco cessation program. And, you know, as I have said before, it... We've actually... I like to think that we have a pretty good success rate. It's pretty much hundred percent in the respect of I can at least get most people to decrease their consumption of whatever form of tobacco or nicotine they're using. You know, several of them have quit completely as well, but, you know, it's a process for a lot of people. So, if I can even get someone to at least decrease their intake, that's still a win to me and definitely still better for their health. Right? So, yes, give us a call, come by, and we can get you enrolled in that tobacco cessation program. And you get to save money on your insurance premiums too. Right?



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Brenda: And there's an important deadline coming up. The last day to enroll in the nicotine cessation program is Monday, October 12. So, if this is something that you've been considering, act fast. Don't wait until the deadline. To enroll, set up your phone, email consultation. Please contact the Fort Bend County Clinic at (281) 633-7750.

Wendy: And that's a wrap for this week's benefit detective podcast. I'm Wendy.

Brenda: And I'm Brenda, and we'll see you on the next episode.

Gina: And remember, the Benefit Detectives are here to help.