

Unit 6: World of Caffeine

Narrator: From morning coffee to afternoon tea, today, caffeine is a daily part of life for millions of people. But just what is caffeine? Caffeine is a chemical compound that occurs naturally in coffee beans, tea leaves, cacao beans, and some tree nuts. From these, we have been making caffeinated beverages for centuries.

In its different forms, caffeine entered our diets at different times, in different places around the world. For instance, coffee became popular in the 15th and 16th centuries, especially among the people of the Ottoman Empire. But cacao beans may have been consumed in Mesoamerica thousands of years earlier, from around 1400 BC. Likewise, while the origins of tea drinking in China, according to legend, date back over 5 thousand years, it only really caught on in Britain from the mid-18th century.

Today, caffeine can be found nearly everywhere, and more and more caffeinated products are available from traditional beverages to caffeine-infused energy drinks. In the United States, nearly 90 percent of the population has at least one caffeinated drink every day. Up to 400 milligrams of caffeine (or about 4 cups of coffee) is considered safe for an adult. However, some consume even more than this amount. Too much caffeine for any one person can cause negative side effects such as migraines, insomnia, nervousness, and muscle tremors. In fact, 1 tablespoon of pure caffeine, equal to drinking 75 cups of coffee at once, can cause lethal results.

As such, while caffeine may provide benefits such as increased focus, alertness, and energy, consuming too much can have considerable risks.