GoalTodo

Cut down on caffeine: count a week, then step down or stop

Cut down on caffeine

8 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Jan 24

Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

Count one ordinary week, from every source

Count

- [ ] Write down everything you have with caffeine in it: coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks, chocolate, and any medicine or tablet with caffeine. Note the time and the size (a small cup, a mug, a large takeaway cup, a can)
  every time, as you have it
- [ ] Check the labels of the medicines you take, such as pain relievers and cold medicines, for caffeine. Ask a pharmacist if you're not sure
- [ ] Turn each day into rough milligrams, using "How much caffeine is in what" and the labels. Add up the week, divide by seven, and write down your daily average
  one rough number: mg a day
- [ ] Write down your reasons for stopping and keep them where you'll see them
- [ ] Find the Monday your quit week starts on the plan, and write it down as your caffeine-free day

Done when: You have a rough daily average in milligrams for seven ordinary days, counted from every source, and you didn't cut back yet to make it look better

Sticking point: Count a normal week, not a quiet one, and don't change anything yet. Before week two, read "Before you start": if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, have a heart condition, high blood pressure or an anxiety disorder, or take a medicine with caffeine in it, talk to a doctor or pharmacist first.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

Three-quarters, and an earlier last drink

Step down

- [ ] Have about three-quarters of your daily average: cut about a quarter of the milligrams by dropping or swapping a drink, or using smaller cups
  about three-quarters of your week 1 mg a day
- [ ] Swap the drink you'll miss least for decaf, or for a caffeine-free drink you like
- [ ] Have your last caffeine at least six hours before you go to bed
- [ ] Write down each drink and the time
  what, how big, when

Done when: Every day this week you stayed at or under about three-quarters of your daily average, with no caffeine in the six hours before bed

Sticking point: You can get withdrawal symptoms from cutting back, not only from stopping: a dull headache or feeling tired in the first days is common. If it's hard going, hold this amount for a few more days rather than giving up the step.

Dec 14–20
Week 3

Three-quarters again, on an ordinary busy week

Step down

- [ ] Stay at about three-quarters of your daily average
  about three-quarters of your week 1 mg a day
- [ ] Plan your hardest moment of the day (the afternoon slump, the early start, the long drive) with something other than caffeine: a short walk outside, a few minutes away from your screen, a caffeine-free drink
- [ ] Last caffeine at least six hours before bed
- [ ] Write down each drink and the time
  what, how big, when

Done when: A second week at about three-quarters or under, and you know what you'll do instead at your hardest moment of the day

Sticking point: Watch for swaps that aren't swaps: a cola or an energy drink in place of a coffee still counts.

Dec 21–27
Week 4

Half of where you started

Step down

- [ ] Have about half of your daily average
  about half of your week 1 mg a day
- [ ] Keep last week's swaps, and swap one more drink for decaf or caffeine-free
- [ ] Last caffeine at least six hours before bed
- [ ] Write down each drink and the time
  what, how big, when

Done when: Every day this week you stayed at or under about half your daily average

Sticking point: If a headache comes, check what you take for it: some pain relievers have caffeine in them. A pharmacist can tell you which ones don't.

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

A quarter, and clear the cupboard

Step down

- [ ] Have about a quarter of your daily average, all of it in the morning
  about a quarter of your week 1 mg a day
- [ ] Everything else decaf or caffeine-free
- [ ] On Sunday, put away or give away the caffeine you won't need: the coffee, the tea bags, the cans in the fridge
- [ ] Write down each drink and the time
  what, how big, when

Done when: Every day this week you stayed at or under about a quarter of your daily average, and by Sunday night there's no caffeine in easy reach

Sticking point: Plan the first two days of next week to be as easy as you can make them: fewer early starts, no big deadlines if you can move them.

Jan 4–10
Week 6

Your first caffeine-free week

Quit week

- [ ] Caffeine-free day: no coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks or other caffeine at all
- [ ] Keep your usual drink times with a caffeine-free drink, such as a caffeine-free herbal tea or hot water with lemon
  each usual time
- [ ] Write one line on how you slept and how you feel
  one line
- [ ] Go to bed at your usual time, even if you feel wide awake or very tired

Done when: You get through your caffeine-free day, and reach Sunday with no caffeine

Sticking point: Withdrawal symptoms may begin within 12 to 24 hours and can last about seven days: a headache, tiredness, crankiness, feeling low, or trouble concentrating are all part of it. It isn't dangerous, and it passes.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

A second caffeine-free week, and the hidden sources

Keep going

- [ ] No caffeine, all week
- [ ] Check the labels on anything new before you have it: medicines, gums, snacks, supplements and fizzy drinks can have caffeine added
- [ ] Decide what you'll say when someone offers you a coffee, and say it
- [ ] Write one line on how you slept and how you feel
  one line

Done when: Fourteen days without caffeine, and you've checked the labels of the medicines and snacks you have most often

Sticking point: If you had a lot of caffeine every day, withdrawal can last more than a week. If you still have headaches or feel very low after this week, talk to your doctor.

Jan 18–24
Week 8

Look back and keep going

Keep going

- [ ] No caffeine, all week
- [ ] Read back through your notes from week 1 to now: how you slept, how you felt, what helped
- [ ] Write a short plan for the moments you're most likely to slip: tired mornings, long days, travel, a new job
- [ ] Decide whether decaf comes back after the plan. It has a little caffeine, so stick with caffeine-free if you'd rather have none

Done when: Three weeks caffeine-free, and you have a written plan for the moments you might slip

Sticking point: A coffee on a hard day isn't the end of the plan. If you have one, write down what led to it and carry on caffeine-free the next day.

How the plan works

Health bodies agree on one thing about quitting caffeine: if you have it every day, cut back gradually rather than all at once. The FDA says withdrawal isn't considered dangerous, but it can be unpleasant. So the plan has three steps:

1. Count one ordinary week. Write down everything with caffeine in it: coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks, chocolate, and medicines with caffeine added. Note the time and the size. Don't change anything yet. Then use "How much caffeine is in what" and the labels to turn it into a rough daily average in milligrams: the number the rest of the plan works from.

2. Step down about a quarter at a time. About three-quarters of your milligrams, then half, then (if you're stopping) a quarter, then none. Each step lasts at least a week. Drop a drink, use a smaller cup, or swap one for decaf or a caffeine-free drink to get there.

3. Know what changes when. Cutting back or stopping can bring a few days of headaches and tiredness. The section below says when to expect it.

The pacing is GoalTodo's own design: the sources say to cut back gradually, and how long withdrawal lasts, but don't prescribe a number of weeks or a quarter a week. If a step is too hard, stay on it for a few more days, or repeat the week, before you move on.

Which level to pick

▪ I want to stop: a week of counting, four weeks of stepping down (three-quarters, three-quarters again, half, a quarter), then a caffeine-free day and three weeks of staying caffeine-free. 8 weeks.

▪ I want to cut down: a week of counting, then three-quarters for two weeks and half for two weeks, a second count to check, and a week to set your everyday limit. 7 weeks.

Not sure? Count your week first: it's the same for both levels. You can cut down first and choose to stop at the end.

Want to stop on a set day instead? Health bodies advise cutting back gradually, which is why both levels taper. If you choose to stop all at once anyway, start at the quit week and expect withdrawal for up to about a week. If you're giving up caffeine for Lent, the Give something up for Lent plan has the dates.

How much caffeine is in what

Amounts vary a lot with the size of the cup, how it's made and the product, so treat these as rough guides. EFSA, the European Union's food safety body, gives these approximate amounts:

▪ an espresso (60 ml): 80 mg

▪ a cup of filter coffee (200 ml): 90 mg

▪ a cup of black tea (220 ml): 50 mg

▪ a can of cola (355 ml): 40 mg

▪ a can of energy drink (250 ml): 80 mg

▪ a bar of plain chocolate (50 g): 25 mg

▪ a bar of milk chocolate (50 g): 10 mg

MedlinePlus, from the US National Library of Medicine, gives ranges for US serving sizes: 95 to 200 mg in an 8-ounce cup of coffee, 14 to 60 mg in an 8-ounce cup of tea, 35 to 45 mg in a 12-ounce can of cola, and 70 to 100 mg in an 8-ounce energy drink. A large takeaway coffee can count as two or more drinks.

Decaf isn't caffeine-free. The FDA says decaf coffee typically has 2 to 15 mg in an 8-ounce cup.

Caffeine hides in other places too. Some pain relievers, cold medicines and over-the-counter medicines for alertness have caffeine added, and so do some gums, snacks and supplements. Check the label, or ask a pharmacist.

The limits health bodies give:

▪ Healthy adults: up to 400 mg a day (the FDA, EFSA and Health Canada). EFSA adds that single doses up to 200 mg don't raise safety concerns for healthy adults.

▪ Pregnant or breastfeeding: the NHS and healthdirect say no more than 200 mg a day, and EFSA gives 200 mg a day in pregnancy. Health Canada gives 300 mg a day for people who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding. Because the figures differ, ask your midwife or doctor what's right for you.

▪ Children and teens should have less than adults. Talk to a doctor.

400 mg is a ceiling, not a target. People vary a lot in how sensitive they are to caffeine, and Health Canada says that if you're sensitive, you might avoid it or have less.

What changes when

If you've had caffeine regularly, cutting back or stopping can bring withdrawal. It isn't dangerous, and it passes. What people commonly notice:

▪ headaches

▪ tiredness or drowsiness

- irritability or crankiness
- feeling low, or anxious
- trouble concentrating
- feeling sick, and sometimes sweating or aching muscles

When: symptoms may begin within 12 to 24 hours of your last caffeine and can last about seven days (the Better Health Channel, Victoria). MedlinePlus says they usually go away after a couple of days. If you've had very large amounts every day, they can last more than a week (healthdirect).

You can feel some of this from cutting back, too, not only from stopping. That's why the plan steps down a quarter at a time, with two weeks at three-quarters, and why the quit week is planned to be light.

If symptoms are severe, or still going after a week or two, talk to your doctor.

Caffeine and sleep

Caffeine reaches its peak in your blood within an hour, and MedlinePlus says you may feel the effects for four to six hours. EFSA says a single dose of 100 mg, about a cup of filter coffee, may affect how long and how well some adults sleep, particularly close to bedtime.

So every week of the plan has the same rule: your last caffeine at least six hours before you go to bed. If you sleep badly, make it earlier. That six-hour line is the plan's own rule, built on those figures.

In the first caffeine-free week your sleep can be unsettled. Keep your usual bedtime. The Be asleep by 11 plan can run alongside this one.

Before you start

Talk to a doctor, midwife or pharmacist before you start if:

- you're pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or breastfeeding
- you have a heart condition, including a problem with the rate or rhythm of your heartbeat
- you have high blood pressure
- you have an anxiety disorder, a sleep disorder, or migraines or other chronic headaches
- you take medicines or supplements, especially stimulants, certain antibiotics, asthma medicines or heart medicines, since some interact with caffeine
- a doctor prescribed a medicine that has caffeine in it: don't stop it without asking them
- you're under 18

Signs of too much caffeine include restlessness and shakiness, trouble sleeping, headaches, dizziness, a fast heart rate and anxiety. The FDA says to talk with your health care professional if you have symptoms like these.

Where to get help

Your doctor or pharmacist is the best first step anywhere, especially about medicines with caffeine in them or headaches that won't settle.

- UK: in England, NHS 111, online or by phone, if you think you need medical help right now and can't reach your GP. In Scotland, NHS 24 on 111; in Wales, NHS 111 Wales; in Northern Ireland, nidirect lists where to get help.
- Australia: the healthdirect helpline, 1800 022 222, to speak with a registered nurse.
- US and Canada: your doctor or pharmacist. In an emergency, call 911.

If someone has had a very large amount of caffeine, such as from a pure or highly concentrated caffeine product, call your local emergency number (999 in the UK, 911 in the US).

Tools

▪ Somewhere to count: a notebook or your phone's notes. Write each drink down when you have it, with the time and the size, so your weekly totals compare.

▪ A rough guide to amounts: the list in "How much caffeine is in what", or the label on the pack, to turn your count into milligrams.

▪ Decaf and caffeine-free drinks you actually like, ready before the week you need them: decaf coffee or tea, herbal tea, caffeine-free soft drinks, hot water with lemon.

▪ A smaller cup, which makes the in-between steps easy.

▪ Your reasons, written down where you'll see them.

Common mistakes

▪ Counting only coffee. Tea, cola, energy drinks, chocolate and some medicines all count.

▪ Counting a large cup as one. A large takeaway coffee can hold as much as two or more small cups.

▪ Swapping coffee for cola or an energy drink. That moves the caffeine, it doesn't cut it.

▪ Stopping all at once by accident. A busy week without your usual coffee can bring on withdrawal. Step down on purpose instead.

▪ Taking a headache tablet with caffeine in it. Check the label, or ask a pharmacist.

▪ Making up for a bad night with extra cups. Keep to your amount and your six-hour rule.

▪ Reading withdrawal as failure. A headache and a slow few days are part of it, and they pass.

Keeping it up

After the last week there are no more weekly tasks. Keep three things going:

▪ Your six-hour rule for the last caffeine of the day, if you still have any.

▪ The count, once a month. Add up one week and compare it with week 1. If it's creeping back up, go back to the last step you held for two weeks, then step down again.

▪ Your plan for hard days: a bad night, a deadline, travel.

If you go back to your old amount, you haven't failed. Count one ordinary week again and start from the first step. If you also want to change other habits, the Drink less alcohol, Quit smoking or vaping and Quit or cut down on weed plans follow the same shape.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: Repeat the week you're on rather than moving on. A step that holds for a week is worth more than two that don't.

Missed 2 weeks: Go back to the last step you held for a full week and do it again before you carry on. On the stop level, if you're back on caffeine every day, set your caffeine-free day for a Monday after that step.

Missed 3 weeks: Count one ordinary week again, honestly, without changing anything. Then restart at "Three-quarters, and an earlier last drink", working from your new average. Enter a new date on the plan page if you need one.

Missed 4 or more weeks: Count a week again and pick the level that fits that count, with a new date on the plan page. If you keep finding you can't cut back, or the headaches are hard to cope with, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Sources

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/spilling-beans-how-much-caffeine-too-much
“For most adults, the FDA has cited 400 milligrams* a day — that's about two to three 12-fluid-ounce cups of coffee — as an amount not generally associated with negative effects.”

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/spilling-beans-how-much-caffeine-too-much
“If you’re used to drinking caffeine-containing beverages every day, and want to cut back, it’s best to do so gradually. Caffeine withdrawal isn’t considered dangerous but can be unpleasant.”

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/spilling-beans-how-much-caffeine-too-much
“For example, decaf coffee typically has 2 to 15 milligrams in an 8-fluid-ounce cup.”

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/caffeine
“Intakes up to 400mg per day (about 5.7mg/kg bw per day) consumed throughout the day do not raise safety concerns for healthy adults in the general population, except pregnant women.”

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/caffeine
“Caffeine intakes from all sources up to 200mg per day consumed throughout the day do not raise safety concerns for the foetus.”

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/caffeine
“Single doses of 100mg (about 1.4mg/kg bw) of caffeine may affect sleep duration and patterns in some adults, particularly when consumed close to bedtime.”

MedlinePlus (US National Library of Medicine)
https://medlineplus.gov/caffeine.html
“For example, some pain relievers, cold medicines, and over-the-counter medicines for alertness contain synthetic caffeine.”

MedlinePlus (US National Library of Medicine)
https://medlineplus.gov/caffeine.html
“You may continue to feel the effects of caffeine for four to six hours.”

MedlinePlus (US National Library of Medicine)
https://medlineplus.gov/caffeine.html
“These symptoms usually go away after a couple of days.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/caffeine
“Symptoms of caffeine withdrawal may begin within 12 to 24 hours and can last about seven days.”

Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)
https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/caffeine
“The easiest way for you to break caffeine dependence is to reduce the amount you’re having gradually.”

healthdirect (Australian Government)
https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/healthy-living/food-and-nutrition/caffeine
“Caffeine is addictive and you may develop withdrawal symptoms when reducing your intake.”

healthdirect (Australian Government)
https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/healthy-living/food-and-nutrition/caffeine

“If you drink a very large amount of caffeine regularly, withdrawal symptoms may last for more than a week.”

healthdirect (Australian Government)
https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/healthy-living/food-and-nutrition/caffeine
“If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it's a good idea to limit your intake of caffeine to 200mg per day.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/foods-to-avoid/
“Caffeine can be found in coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks and tablets, chocolate, guarana, and some health or fitness supplements.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/foods-to-avoid/
“Having too much caffeine has been linked to a higher chance of miscarriage and stillbirth.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/urgent-and-emergency-care-services/when-to-use-111/
“NHS 111 can help if you think you need medical help right now.”

Health Canada (archived copy)
https://web.archive.org/web/20260109004122/https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-safety/food-additives/caffeine-foods.html
“Based on this review, we recommend maximum daily caffeine intakes depending on your age and circumstances.”

Health Canada (archived copy)
https://web.archive.org/web/20260109004122/https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-safety/food-additives/caffeine-foods.html
“If you're sensitive to caffeine, consider avoiding it or lowering your intake.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/urgent-and-emergency-care-services/when-to-use-111/
“How to get urgent medical help elsewhere in the UK Scotland – NHS 24 111 Wales – NHS 111 Wales Northern Ireland – nidirect: advice about illnesses and conditions”

This plan online	https://goaltodo.com/cut-down-caffeine
Reach it with others on Welang	https://welang.com/goals
Reach it on your own in HourLife	https://www.hourlife.com

This plan is a guide, not medical advice. See a doctor before starting if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time.