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Coffee quitters could get some help: Decaf dose may help reduce withdrawal symptoms

Caffeine is most widely consumed drug, yet kicking the coffee habit is not easy

By [Shiv Sudhakar](#) | Fox News



New study shows drinking coffee daily can lead to living longer: Dr. Janette Nesheiwat

Fox News medical contributor Dr. Janette Nesheiwat provides analysis of a new study published by the Journal of Internal Medicine that says drinking coffee can lower your risk of contracting various deadly diseases on 'Fox & Friends Weekend.'

A new study gives hope to those who want to change their [morning coffee ritual](#).

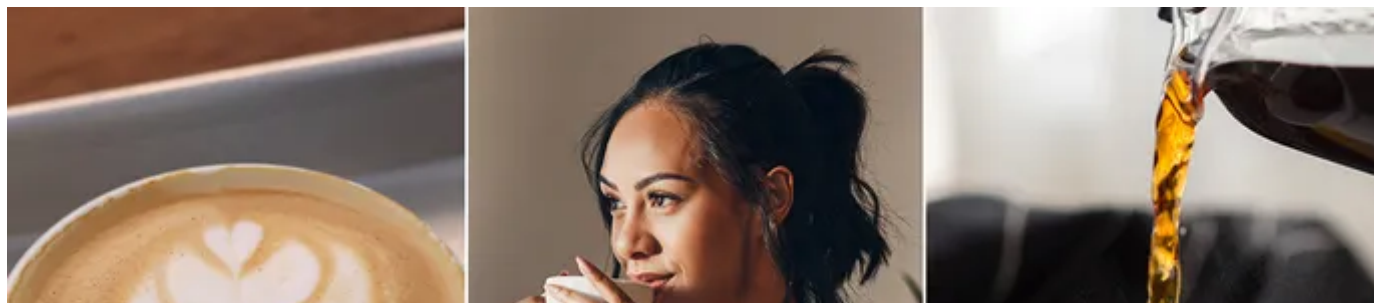
Researchers have found that a cup of decaffeinated coffee can reduce coffee drinkers' caffeine withdrawal symptoms, according to a recent report in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, a monthly peer-reviewed scientific journal.

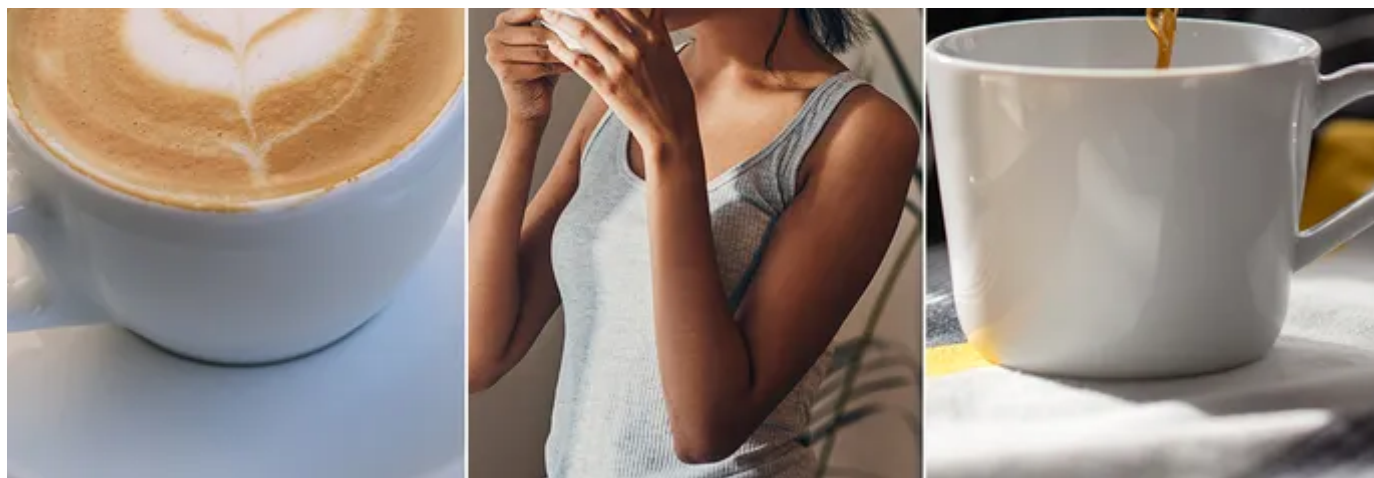
The researchers found that people experienced fewer withdrawal symptoms, even when they were not expecting it.

COFFEE TO GO: VIRGINIA SISTERS OPEN MOBILE COFFEE SHOP, STRENGTHENING THEIR BOND WHILE THEY SERVE THE COMMUNITY

"People who are trying to give up caffeine may find that drinking a cup of decaf when their cravings are at their peak may help reduce their withdrawal for long enough to ride out the worst of it and not give in to temptation," lead author Dr. Llew Mills, a senior research associate at the University of Sydney School of Addiction Medicine [in Australia](#), told Fox News Digital.

Approximately 80% of American adults consume caffeine on a daily basis, according to the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA).





"People who are trying to give up caffeine may find that drinking a cup of decaf when their cravings are at their peak may help reduce their withdrawal" symptoms, said the lead researcher of a new study. (iStock)

The study noted, however, that one of the biggest barriers is a concern over [withdrawal symptoms](#); but previous research shows that only a subset of people will experience withdrawal symptoms after they quit caffeine.

These symptoms [include headaches](#); feeling tired; having decreased alertness, drowsiness and irritability; and having a depressed mood, according to previous research.

Caffeine withdrawal starts around 12 to 24 hours after a person suddenly stops it — and peaks within one to two days. However, the symptoms can be reduced if caffeine is reduced gradually, per previous studies.

"We recruited heavy coffee drinkers and made them abstain from all sources of caffeine for 24 hours."

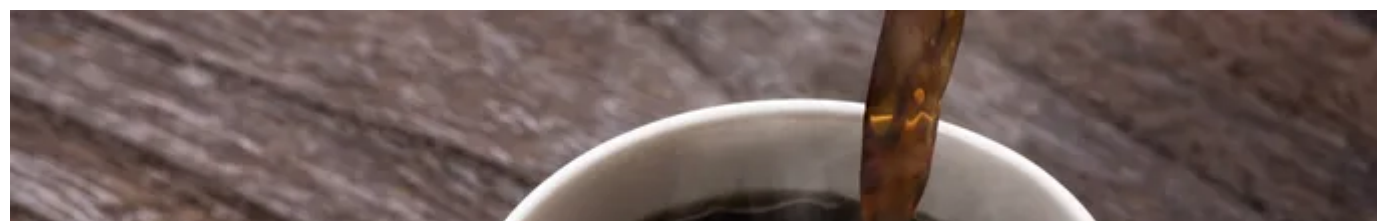
For patients trying to quit, taking a "placebo," a treatment similar to the drug — but without the

drug's active properties — has been shown to help decrease withdrawal symptoms.

A common research technique to induce the "placebo effect" is when researchers "deceive" the participants by not telling them if the treatment that they're receiving contains the drug's active ingredients, the study says.

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"Unfortunately, in clinical drug and [alcohol settings](#), such deceptive methods (e.g. swapping methadone for a sweet solution without informing the patient) are simply not ethical for either research or treatment, presenting too large a risk to patients' welfare and breaching informed consent," the report added.





After 24 hours of abstaining from coffee, 61 participants self-reported their caffeine-withdrawal symptoms, a new study reported. (iStock)

Recent studies suggest alternatively telling participants they are receiving a placebo — without deceiving them — can also elicit placebo effects.

"We recruited heavy coffee drinkers [meaning more than three cups of coffee a day] and made them abstain from all sources of caffeine for 24 hours," Mills told Fox News Digital via email.

He noted that most of the people in the study were students who participated for course credit; so they selected only a 24-hour window of abstinence because it was unrealistic for researchers to expect them to stay off all forms of caffeine for more than one day.

The researchers only had a short window of time to gather the data.

After 24 hours of abstaining from coffee, 61 participants self-reported their caffeine-withdrawal

symptoms — and then were divided into one of three groups.

COFFEE QUIZ: HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS CAN'T-LIVE-WITHOUT-IT DRINK?

"[With] one group, the 'deceptive group,' we gave decaf but lied to them and told them it was regular, caffeinated coffee," Mills said.

"[For] another group, the 'open label' group, we gave decaf and told them the truth that it was decaf," he added.



"Years of drinking coffee means there is a strong unconscious and conscious association in the minds of coffee drinkers between all the stimuli surrounding coffee drinking." (iStock)

"The third group, the control group, we gave water to and told them truthfully it was water."

The participants again reported their caffeine withdrawal symptoms after 45 minutes.

The researchers only had a short window of time to gather the data because the study "only had so many hours of student credit allocated to us and we wanted to get as many subjects as possible," Mills said.

'Years of drinking coffee'

The "deceptive group," which thought they received caffeinated coffee but only actually drank decaf, had the highest point reduction in withdrawal symptoms among all three groups.

COFFEE MAY PERK UP YOUR LIFE EXPECTANCY, COFEE SUGGESTS

The open-label group reported also a significant but smaller reduction in withdrawal symptoms compared to the deceptive group.

All decaffeinated coffee has trace amounts of caffeine in it — this was one limitation of the study.

The control group did not experience a reduction in withdrawal symptoms, suggesting "the observed reduction effect in the other two groups was a genuine [placebo effect](#)," the study said.

"The open-label group did not have the conscious expectancy of withdrawal reduction, but we believe they had a strong unconscious expectancy and this is what led to the reduction in their withdrawal," Mills said.



"Decaf coffees and teas have less caffeine than their regular counterparts, but they still contain some caffeine," the FDA notes on its website. (AP)

He explains that "conscious expectancy" is what people expect to happen.

"We think this happened because of unconscious expectancies — another way of saying conditioning," he said.

"Years of drinking coffee means there is a strong [unconscious and conscious association](#) in the minds of coffee drinkers between all the stimuli surrounding coffee drinking — the taste, the smell, the warmth of the cup, etc. — and their withdrawal being reduced," Mills added.

Decaf coffee contains some caffeine: study's limitations

The researchers only measured the participants' withdrawal symptoms a short time after they received a decaf cup of coffee, so the withdrawal reduction effects of the participants could be temporary.

[DRINKING COFFEE ON A DAILY BASIS CAN EXTEND YOUR LIFE: NEW STUDY](#)

Mills noted another limitation of the study: All decaffeinated coffee has trace amounts of caffeine in it.

A typical eight-ounce cup of coffee contains an estimated 80-100 mg of caffeine, per the FDA.

"Decaf coffees and teas have less caffeine than their regular counterparts, but they still contain some caffeine," the FDA notes on its website.

"For example, decaf coffee typically has 2-15 milligrams in an 8-ounce cup," the website also says.

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The study's cup of decaf contained 4 mg of caffeine, so a "major [limitation] was the absence of a given water + 4 mg caffeine/told water group."

Previous research shows that the re-administration of caffeine can quickly reverse withdrawal symptoms within one hour, but a typical eight-ounce cup of coffee contains an estimated 80-100 mg of caffeine, per the FDA.

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"We think it unlikely this small a dose of caffeine could reduce withdrawal as much as was observed in the open-label group among 24-hour abstinent heavy coffee drinkers," said Mills.

"However, however at the moment it remains a possibility," he added.



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