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Kicking the Coffee Habit But Scared of Withdrawal? Try Decaf

By [HealthDay](#) | Feb. 17, 2023

By Cara Murez HealthDay Reporter

FRIDAY, Feb. 17, 2023 (HealthDay News) – Researchers may have found a way for coffee-lovers to cut back without suffering symptoms of caffeine withdrawal like headache, fatigue, bad mood and irritability.



(HEALTHDAY)

It's a cup of decaf.

A [new study](#) found that people experienced fewer withdrawal symptoms with the substitute.

"A convincing cup of decaf has the power to reduce withdrawal symptoms a lot when the person drinking it is unaware it's decaf. But our study suggests that even if they are aware it's decaf, their withdrawal still subsides," said [Dr. Llew Mills](#), a senior research associate at the University of Sydney School of Addiction Medicine, in Australia.

For the study, researchers worked with 61 people who said they consumed three or more cups of coffee a day. Each went caffeine-free for 24 hours, and their withdrawal was measured.

Participants were then separated into three groups.

Two groups were given decaf coffee, and one of those groups was told that it was decaf. The other was deceived into thinking it was regular coffee. The third group was given water.

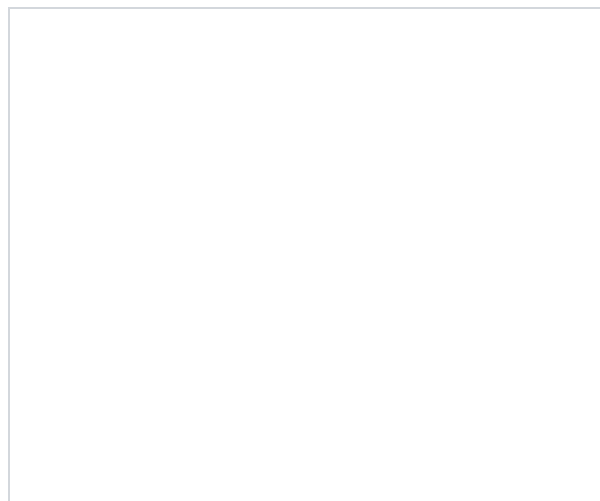
About 45 minutes later, participants were asked to rate their withdrawal symptoms again.

"The group we lied to reported a big drop in caffeine withdrawal even though there's no pharmacological reason why it should," Mills said. "Because they expected their withdrawal to go down, it did go down."

That's known as a placebo effect — a result that happens even when you are getting a fake substitute.

The participants were asked to rate how much they expected various drinks would reduce their withdrawal.

Unsurprisingly, they expected caffeinated coffee would reduce withdrawal the most. But their ratings of expected withdrawal from decaf and water were surprising.



"Funnily enough, they actually expected water to reduce their withdrawal more than decaf," Mills said.

But withdrawal in the group that got water didn't drop at all, while people who were given decaf experienced a significant reduction, the findings showed.

The researchers concluded this effect was driven by strong conditioning built up over a lifetime of coffee drinking. Years of associating the taste and smell of coffee with an easing of caffeine craving means even decaf can elicit a conditioned response.

That benefit was probably short-lived, Mills noted.

"But a cup of decaf could help someone who is trying to cut back their caffeine intake to temporarily ride out the worst of the cravings and help them stay caffeine-free," he said.

Mills said the study shows that factors like what you expect and how much of a drug you think you have in your body have a big effect on how you experience withdrawal symptoms.

"We did this study to model some of the processes involved in addiction to any drug, including more serious, or harmful, drugs," Mills said in a university news release.

"What we found has some promise for developing new treatments for addiction that integrate placebo effects."

The findings were recently published online in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*.

More information

The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more on [caffeine](#).

SOURCE: University of Sydney, news release, Feb. 14, 2023

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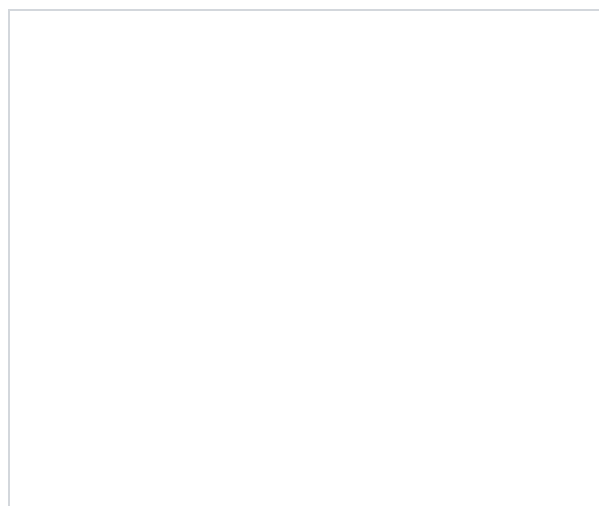
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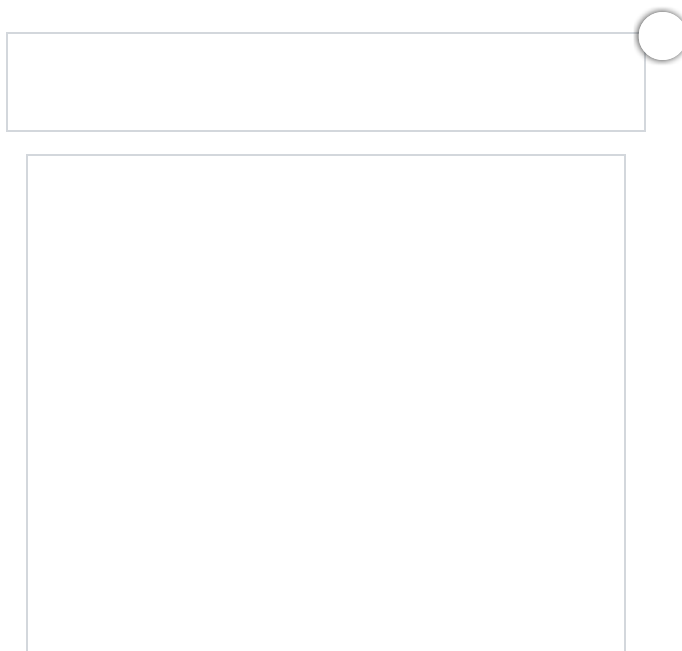
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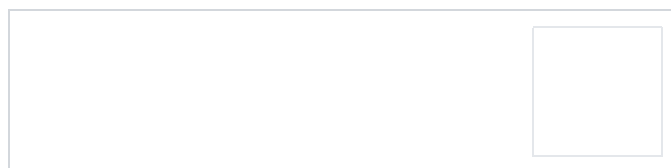
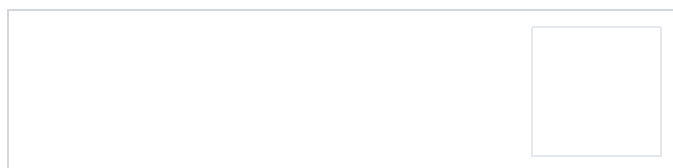
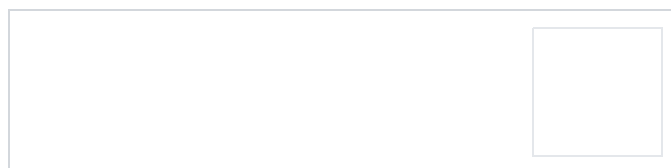
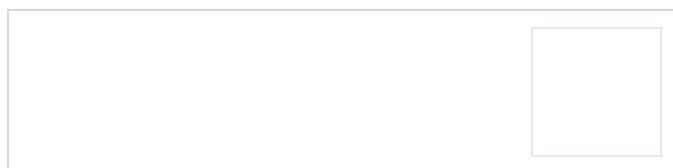
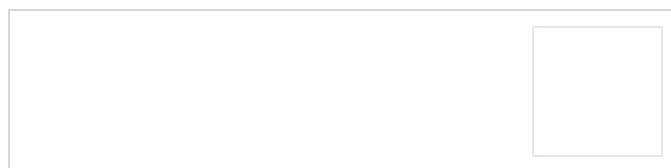
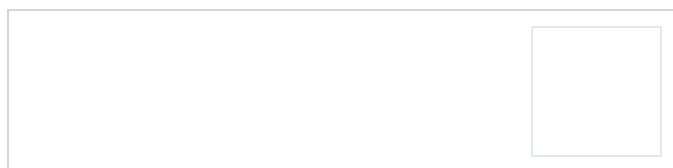
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Kaia Hubbard Feb. 23, 2023

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