

Caffeine addiction is real

Is there such a thing as a caffeine addiction? Yes, according to a growing number of governors and mayors around the country. And as with any addiction, there's also withdrawal, according to the latest scientific research.

Last year, the governors of five states and the mayors of 17 cities all signed proclamations declaring March as National Caffeine Awareness Month to call attention to the dangers of caffeine dependency and intoxication.

The event was sponsored by the Caffeine Awareness Alliance, a non-profit organization.

"Caffeine-induced stress can produce mood swings and insomnia, increased muscle tension, impair digestion and nutrition, restrict blood circulation to the brain, raise blood pressure and accelerate the heart rate," said Marina Kushner, founder of the Caffeine Awareness Alliance, in a press release.

Just as scientists have begun to recognize the reality of addictions to caffeine, they now also recognize caffeine withdrawal as a disorder.

In general, the more caffeine consumed, the more severe withdrawal symptoms are likely to be; but as little as one standard cup of coffee a day can produce caffeine addiction, according to a Johns Hopkins Medicine study that reviewed more than 170 years of caffeine withdrawal research.

"Caffeine is the world's most commonly used stimulant, and it's cheap and readily available so people can maintain their use of caffeine quite easily," said Dr. Roland Griffiths, professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at Johns Hopkins.

Speaking in a press release, Dr. Griffiths explained that when people don't get their usual dose they can suffer a range of withdrawal symptoms, including headache, fatigue and difficulty concentrating.

"They may even feel like they have the flu with nausea and muscle pain," Dr. Griffiths explained.

Dr. Griffiths and Dr. Laura Juliano of American University published their findings in the October 2004 issue of the journal *Psychopharmacology*.

The research also showed that avoidance of caffeine withdrawal symptoms motivates regular use of caffeine. For example, the satisfying feelings and perceived benefits that many coffee users experience from their morning coffee appear to be a simple reversal of the negative effects of caffeine withdrawal after overnight abstinence, according to a Hopkins press release.

But there is good news for those wishing to quit caffeine: A simple, stepwise approach can often eliminate the need for a “fix” without suffering the most severe withdrawal symptoms.

According to the report, caffeine is the most widely used behaviorally active drug in the world. In North America, 80 percent to 90 percent of adults report regular use of caffeine. Average daily intake of caffeine among caffeine consumers in the United States is about 280 milligrams, or about one to two mugs of coffee or three to five bottles of soft drink, with higher intakes estimated in some European countries. In the United States, coffee and soft drinks are the most common sources of caffeine, with almost half of caffeine consumers ingesting caffeine from multiple sources, including tea.