



Mott Poll Report

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Parents Asleep on Teen Caffeine Consumption?

Caffeine is present in a broad range of food and beverages. Too much caffeine can cause a variety of health problems. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 13-18 years old about their teen's caffeine consumption.

Parents report the most common sources of caffeine for their teen include soda (73%), tea (32%), coffee (31%), and energy drinks (22%). Parents say teens most often consume caffeine at home (81%), as well as when dining out (43%), spending time out with friends (35%), and while in school (25%). Nearly one-quarter of parents say their teen consumes caffeine most or all days of the week (9% every day, 14% 4-6 days). More parents of teens 16-18 years than 13-15 years report daily caffeine consumption (14% vs 6%). Parents whose teens consume caffeine most or all days of the week say their teens drink caffeine because it is present in their teen's favorite products (43%) and because peers drink the same products (23%). Less often parents say their teen drinks caffeine to stay awake during the day (18%), manage an early school start time (16%), or help with studying or focus (13%).

The 74% of parents who report their teen consumes caffeine 0-3 days per week say their family does not usually have caffeinated drinks at home (42%), or that their teen is trying to be healthy (29%) or does not want to disrupt sleep (11%).

Most parents believe they know whether their teen is consuming too much caffeine (66%) and which products have too much caffeine (61%). Sixty percent say they have heard about the risks of highly caffeinated products. Two-thirds of parents (64%) think the recommended daily limit of caffeine for teens is less than 100 mg, but 57% say they rarely look at caffeine amounts when buying beverages for their teen. Parents think their teen has heard about the risks of too much caffeine from parents or other family members (60%), teachers, coaches, or other school staff (24%) or a healthcare provider (21%).

Two-thirds of parents (67%) say they themselves consume caffeine most or all days of the week. One third of parents (34%) say they have tried to cut back on their caffeine intake, while 16% say their teen has tried to reduce caffeine consumption.

Why teens drink caffeine

Among parents who say their teen drinks caffeine most or all days of the week



Favorite products	43%
Peers drink them	23%
To stay awake	18%
Early school start	16%
To help study/focus	13%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2024

Report Highlights

1 in 4 parents say their teen consumes caffeine every day or nearly every day.

2 in 3 parents think they know whether their teen is consuming too much caffeine.

1 in 3 parents do not identify recommended caffeine limits for teens.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in February 2024 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 1-18 years living in their household (n=2,057). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 61% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,095 parents with at least one child age 13-18. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 7 percentage points.

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Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.

C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

Caffeine is a drug that stimulates the brain and nervous system, and can produce a short-term increase in alertness, focus, and energy. Excessive caffeine consumption in teens can affect their mood, sleep, and school performance, along with side effects like headache, upset stomach, or heart palpitations. Like some other drugs, people who consume caffeine can become dependent. In addition, the effect wanes over time, requiring the person to drink more to get the same impact, which increases the risk of negative side effects.

The US Food and Drug Administration says that for healthy adults, 400 milligrams per day is "not generally associated with dangerous effects"; the FDA has not given guidance for teens due to insufficient evidence. The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages caffeine intake by children and adolescents, and other experts suggest a limit of 100 milligrams per day for teens. However, 1 in 3 parents in this Mott Poll thought the recommended daily limit was higher.

Even for parents who are aware of these recommendations, estimating their teen's caffeine intake is challenging. An 8-ounce cup of coffee has about 100 milligrams of caffeine, but the range of sizes and types of coffee drinks include many with excessive caffeine levels. Sodas, sports drinks and even certain brands of water can contain substantial amounts of caffeine. Additionally, caffeine is found in products that parents might not suspect, such as gum, snack bars, and over-the-counter pain relievers. Parents in this Mott Poll indicated that the most common place for their teen to consume caffeine was at home; therefore, parents may be able to reduce their teen's caffeine intake by checking product labels and choosing products that do not contain caffeine.

Increased independence during adolescence means teens make choices about which products they purchase and consume without parents' involvement. This can present a challenge for parents who try to monitor or limit their teen's caffeine consumption. Teens may select caffeinated beverages from their school vending machines or spend their own money on caffeinated products. Parents may consider talking with their teen about the negative impact of excessive caffeine, and then explore non-caffeinated options for the teen to select at school or when out with friends.

Energy drinks are popular with teens; a single energy drink may contain up to 500 mg of caffeine along with added sugars. Although this level of caffeine is unhealthy, teens may argue that they need energy drinks to stay awake and alert. In this situation, parents should examine other factors that are impeding the teen's sleep and work with the teen to adjust schedules or bedtimes.

Reducing or eliminating caffeine consumption is often challenging, and may induce symptoms of withdrawal like headaches, nervousness, or irritability. Parents whose teen is consuming caffeine all or most days of the week should consider whether their teen has become dependent on caffeine. One-third of parents in this Mott Poll have tried to curtail their own caffeine use; parents can draw on their own experience to help their teen establish a plan to cut back slowly to avoid withdrawal effects. Parents may enlist the teen's healthcare provider in explaining the risks of caffeine and suggesting strategies to cut back. In addition, parents can involve their teen in selecting non-caffeinated options to have at home.