

Do I Really Have to Give Up Caffeine?

I am generally a big believer in doing any lowcarb diet plan exactly as directed for the first 2-4 weeks, really ALL the way through and of course continuing forever through maintenance, unless/until there is some reason (usually hitting a weight loss standstill) a long way from goal, which makes it necessary to take a closer look and consider tweaking.

Nonetheless, I have a problem with lowcarb plans that order to people remove caffeine from their diets as an essential part of beginning the programs. Often people ask if they could have maybe ONE cup of regular coffee, would that be okay?

I think it IS okay. For someone accustomed to an extremely high caffeine intake, I wouldn't cut it just to one cup—*at first*. If there is one part of the Atkins version of lowcarb that I have come to strongly disagree with, it is the requirement to quit caffeine cold-turkey as part of induction.

Caffeine withdrawal alone is a potent challenge—trying to combine that with extreme carb withdrawal, in my opinion, sets up an obstacle, one which often ends up unnecessarily thwarting beginners. My recommendation for people in this position is to cut caffeine intake by 50% for the first few weeks, then begin lowering it gradually to a moderate amount of 1-2 cups per day. If down the road you begin to suspect that caffeine is thwarting your progress, you can always decide to reduce it further or even eliminate it.

In more than 10 years of working with lowcarbers and endless tinkering with my own personal science project (which included giving up caffeine 3 or 4 times—once for 9 months straight), I have yet to see even one case where caffeine intake, especially **moderate** caffeine intake, was THE serious problem that blocked otherwise-successful weight loss. I *have* seen caffeine intake have an impact on blood sugars, moods, and cravings in some people, and in those cases cutting back or quitting caffeine does seem to have a positive effect, not on weight loss, but on these individuals' ability to be more content and centered with following the WOE, which *in turn*, makes the weight loss more successful. That's not the same thing as a direct effect on weight loss.

Approximately 100% of the time, it's what people insisted on putting IN their coffee or tea that turned out to be (or becomes, over time) problematic. Artificial sweeteners, especially the powdered ones that contain dextrose additives, as well as cream or half-and-half and of course "non-dairy creamers" (which are chemical-crap cuisine made almost entirely from processed forms of sugar), often DO turn out to be culprits that hinder weight-loss progress.

Here's how I slowly conquered my own situation with coffee—well truthfully it was the withdrawal from the cream which I really believed I could never live without. In the summer of 1998, I set a rule for myself that my first cup of coffee could have 1 tablespoon of cream and that was the ONLY dairy I'd consume (yup, that was a

bargain—in this case though, I turned it into a babystep). Any additional cups had to be black, or no more coffee for me. Luckily I am a 2-cup per morning person, and I forced myself to choke down that awful second cup of black coffee. I didn't like it, but somehow over the next two months, I became accustomed to having coffee black, even if it wasn't my favorite. Well, that summer turned beastly hot in August and I decided that an iced coffee would really be great at the end of a long day of that, so I began "saving" the cream for that "treat" and drank both morning cups black. Well...I got into the habit of saving the cream for the afternoon, then...well the weather cooled off and I forgot about the afternoon coffee. And what the heck??—I was ABLE to drink black coffee in the morning.

I'd like to tell you that was all it took, and that I was happy and "cured" of loving (and requiring) cream in my coffee. It wasn't. But the experience of knowing I COULD do it, plus the very strong desire to see if going totally dairy free wouldn't make a difference in my almost two-year-long inability to lose ~30 pounds to get to a good weight for me, kept me choosing no cream for all but my most weak, self-indulgent moments. (I still can remember once attempting to assuage a particularly nasty, crampy menstrual period one cold midwinter Saturday morning with a cup of coffee with cream, it was probably one of my last.) I remember I kept cream in the refrigerator and threw most of it out for a few months, just in case I ever "needed" it.

I did an intense amount of diet experimenting during the winter of 1998-99, which resulted in me finally unlocking what had been blocking my successful weight loss. As part of that experimentation I eliminated coffee entirely, even black, for 8-9 months. But eventually, when I tried adding it back sometime during the spring of 1999, after I had been dairy-free for a long time and I was clear that everything in my body worked better without dairy, when I re-introduced coffee I was "over" the dairy and pleasantly surprised to find that black coffee, in moderate amounts, worked just fine for me (still does). I was in a totally new place: finding that even the thought of (greasy!) cream in my coffee is exactly how I used to think of black coffee—YUCK! Go figure.

This is another example of how in so many instances we can find that changing our *actions* will *lead our feelings* to change completely.

I strongly believe in babysteps on this journey, and induction + total caffeine withdrawal is too much like jumping off a cliff for most folks. You really can, in fact I say most of us HAVE to, get to the beautiful valley at the bottom of the hill without jumping. We gotta drift down slowly and be willing to learn and grow from every twist, turn, pothole and bolder we encounter on the bumpy road to what life in the healthy, thin lane is REALLY going to be about.

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