

## Caffeine consumption trends among children and teenagers

- Children and teenagers drink coffee
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Katrina Budwell's 4-year-old drinks tea and coffee daily. "My daughter loves tea," says the 28-year old mom from Northglenn, Colorado. "She also likes black coffee, but that was an "oops" when I turned my back, and now it's her fave," says Budwell with a laugh.

Giving children caffeine may sound surprising, but a few dozen mothers from around the country interviewed in March via video conference said they offer their young children and/or allow their teens to drink coffee and other caffeinated beverages.

Aviv Darab, a 41-year old graphic designer, says her decision was a failed experiment. "My mom once told me I should let my daughter sip coffee so she'd realize that it didn't taste good; but it backfired, and she was like "More."

Is caffeine consumption in children as young as 4 years old a problem? What about the increasing coffee consumption in teens? And what role does the coffee, energy drink and soft drink industries have to do with this trend toward more caffeine consumption in a younger and younger demographic?

In an age with so much emphasis on nutrition, especially for children, caffeine consumption may be a subject that flies under the radar. In fact, the effects of caffeine on children is understudied, according to a Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews medical [journal report](#) published in 2009. The report mentions that teenage caffeine users may exhibit many characteristics of substance abusers (especially in underdeveloped brains), and that large amounts of sugar are often consumed when drinking caffeinated soda. Even though the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP) recommend that adolescents not consume caffeinated drinks, particularly coffee, the AAP also published a [report](#) in 2011 where 30- to 50 percent of teens and young adults reported that they consume caffeinated beverages at least on a weekly basis.

Jamie Hohner Oliver, from Tidewater, Va., said she has a 'no-caffeine' family, but recently loosened the rules for her high schooler.

"We are a no-caffeine-for-kids family for the most part," said Hohner Oliver. "My 14-year-old has been drinking herbal tea for several years, and in the last year or so she's started drinking [non-caffeinated Frappuccinos](#). Just this year in ninth grade, we told her we were okay with her having one caffeinated drink a day, and she decided to make a coffee drink at home in the a.m. The high school is rampant with coffee and energy drinks, so we're trying to teach her healthy moderation."

Hohner Oliver's desire to teach her daughter moderation while she is an adolescent may be appreciated at her daughter's high school, especially since caffeine consumption is going up among teenagers across the country.

Although consumption of caffeine, regardless of its amount, is most alarming in preschool-aged children and younger simply because of the size and immaturity of their smaller bodies, coffee consumption is increasing among American teenagers. This increase is largely because of three

factors: the availability of [ready-to-drink \(RTD\)](#) caffeinated beverages, the ease of single-serve coffee machines at home, and American parents' lenient behaviors surrounding coffee consumption even for their toddlers and school-aged children.

The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture)'s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) which [administers programs that provide healthy food](#) to public schools and child care facilities published "[A Guide to Smart Snacks in School for School Year 2018-2019](#)" based on a [March 31, 2015 USDA Memo](#), that states that coffee, tea, and espresso drinks such as lattes and cappuccinos can be served inside American high schools. While there are limits to the size of caffeinated beverages (12 ounces or less) served inside American high schools, teenagers often obtain caffeinated beverages during [extracurricular activities](#) such as sporting events.

This is good news for organizations such as the [National Coffee Association](#) (NCA) of U.S.A., Inc. On January 30, 2019, the NCA published, "[Coffee at a Crossroad: 3 Industry Trends to Watch in 2019](#)" based on an article from the [Tea and Coffee Trade Journal](#). The third trend in the report stated that, "...younger consumers are less comfortable brewing coffee. Fortunately, 13-18 year-olds have the strongest positive perceptions of single serve systems, with 93% giving a positive rating."

Michael Edwards, founder and market research consultant for Dig Insights, confirmed the findings in a prepared statement. Edwards stated, "The latest data shows a market shift toward high-quality, premium beverages, with younger demographics driving this change... A growing number of consumers who use a single serve brewer only know how to prepare coffee with that method."

Edwards also stated in NCA's most recently published report, [Generational Report: Coffee Through the Ages](#), that the RTD consumption was highest among 13- to 18-year-olds since the RTD market offered a range of gourmet options that appealed to younger audiences. Gourmet coffee options include cold brew and canned espresso.

For some, drinking coffee, often mixed with milk is part of his or her cultural traditions. As Dr. Lisa Lewis, a pediatrician in Fort Worth, Texas says, "Yes, I definitely think whether children consume coffee is a cultural norm. I have had experience with Italian and Icelandic families who allow their children to drink coffee. I have read that many children in various parts of Europe drink coffee." Dr. Lewis, author of "Feed the Baby Hummus," a book that teaches readers how to incorporate multicultural practices when caring for their babies, believes children consuming coffee could be a cultural norm.

According to a [2015 study by the Boston Medical Center](#) that was published in an issue of the Journal of Human Lactation, 15 percent of toddlers consume nearly four ounces of coffee per day. The study found that 2.5 percent of one-year-olds were drinking coffee, and that Hispanic parents, particularly Mexican-American mothers, were more than likely to give their toddlers coffee at least once a day.

A few of the mothers who participated in the video conference in March shared that sentiment. Mary Hickey said, "I know I'll get some negative feedback for this, but I let my kids have a mini coffee with me in the mornings sometimes. In my defense though, it's a cultural thing! I grew up in Mexico drinking coffee with my grandma. And I vividly remember my mom taking me out every morning for coffee after we dropped off my older sister at school."

“In Puerto Rico, children are given café con leche (coffee with milk) at an early age,” said Mirialys Hernandez. “When I would go to visit my family there when I was younger, I used to drink a small cup of it every day.” Hernandez also said that though her 6-year-old son loves coffee, she doesn’t really like for him to have any, but she still allows him to “have a sip or two here and there from time to time.” Hernandez also treats her 3-year-old with decaffeinated coffee about every two to three weeks. “It is a cultural thing for us, but we do it in very strict moderation.”

Despite her husband’s Mexican culture and heritage, Sonja Limone, a mother of two children under 10 years old, has strict non-caffeine rules. She said, “No caffeine-infused drinks for kids under fourteen in our household. Whether it’s coffee, tea, coke, or any other sodas, it’s a strict no. I did my research before making this choice. It has dangerous health effects on children and teenagers that many parents are unaware of.”

While there is currently little empirical evidence that describes the physiological, psychological, or behavioral effects of caffeine use among children, caffeine is a stimulant and it can cause high blood pressure and increased heart rate. Caffeine can cause headache, dehydration, and difficulty in sleeping especially when consumed in the afternoon.

So, as of present day, there is limited data on the possible negative effects of caffeinated beverages, like coffee and tea, on children, but medical authorities urge caution and moderation. For older children who can independently choose caffeinated beverages, parents should be able to teach their teenagers about the ill effects of caffeine.

As Dr. Lewis said, “My hope is that the coffee is diluted by milk, thus making the caffeine ingestion minimal.”