

FSA and FSS issue guidance on caffeine in food supplements

The FSA and FSS are advising consumers to be mindful of caffeine intake when using food supplements. Supplements with caffeine should be calculated alongside other sources of caffeine, such as coffee, tea and energy drinks. Caffeine intakes of up to 400mg per day are unlikely to cause adverse effects in adults. A limit of 200mg per day is recommended for those who are pregnant.

The guidance has been created following a case in the UK where a man died after miscalculating the amount of caffeine powder he was meant to use. The dose he took was the equivalent of up to 200 cups of coffee. A survey was also conducted which showed less than half of people surveyed look for dosage instructions on supplements, with 20% saying they don't read the label. Research into consumer attitudes towards supplements also revealed that many consumers have limited or no knowledge of caffeine in food supplements.

The FSA and FSS have worked with other government departments with a remit for supplements to summarise existing information for consumers and businesses and publish on food.gov so that it is easier to access.

At very high levels, caffeine can cause anxiety, sleeplessness, agitation, palpitations, diarrhoea and restlessness. Individuals with a mental health condition can experience worsened psychosis. These effects may be more severe in individuals who are caffeine sensitive, or who have underlying health issues such as heart disease or high blood pressure.

'While caffeine is found naturally in many food products, we have evidence that people are unaware of the higher levels of caffeine in some supplements and the risk this can pose. Pure and highly concentrated caffeine supplements such as caffeine powder can be extremely potent, so you should always follow the dose instructions on the label and use appropriate measuring equipment to make sure it's accurate.

'If people are experiencing caffeine side effects, such as sleeplessness and agitation, they should consider the amount of caffeine they are getting from supplements in addition to other components of their diet. We are also recommending that pregnant women limit their daily caffeine consumption to 200mg (the equivalent of roughly two mugs of instant coffee or one mug of filter coffee) and check the label for a warning that the product may be unsuitable.

'We are also reminding businesses of their responsibility to supply safe food and comply with food labelling and compositional requirements, so that consumers will have information to help them make informed choices about what they're eating.'

Professor Robin May, Chief Scientific Advisor, Food Standards Agency

Caffeine added to food supplements can often include much higher levels of caffeine, particularly pure caffeine powder, than you would find in other products, such as coffee or some energy drinks.

Businesses who manufacture supplements are also being reminded of labelling and composition requirements, such as warnings on higher dose caffeine products that these products are not recommended for children or pregnant women.

Our [advice to consumers](#) and [advice to businesses](#) is available on our website.