

## What's For English / Extend Your Listening

### The Buzz and The Bulge: Caffeine and Calories in Coffee

Hello and welcome back to Extend Your Listening on What's for English Dot Com. I'm Gerald Wright.

If you've been following this blog, you know that many of my posts have focused on coffee. And recently I've started blogging a little bit about health-related topics. Those statistics I commented on in my last post, on the rise of obesity in the United States, they were pretty shocking, weren't they? Today I'd like to combine the topics. What about coffee and health? We could look at the health issues related to caffeine. I know many of you would be interested in that. But I may leave that for another day. Rather, today we're going to look at how many calories you get from the coffee you drink.



Cup of coffee (photo by [Ladik](#) on Flickr.com)

Calories? In coffee? Coffee in its purest form - roasted and ground and brewed simply - of course has no or very few calories at all. As long as you don't add milk or sugar. But that's the problem. As soon as you add milk or cream whipped cream or syrups or anything else, the calories start to rise. Would you believe some drinks you can get at Starbucks have as many calories as a Big Mac from MacDonald's? Yes, indeed.

Today I'm looking at a chart called "The Buzz vs. the Bulge." It shows the amount of caffeine and calories in coffee drinks. It also compares the caffeine and calories in the coffee drinks with other drinks - as well as some foods. And you can even look at how much exercise you might need to work off some of the calories you put on by drinking these drinks. The buzz comes from caffeine. Caffeine gives you a jolt of energy; it makes you more alert - and, perhaps, keeps you from sleeping. It's that buzz that makes us feel pretty good, helps us to get through the day, and keeps us going for more. The bulge refers to what happens to your body when you put on weight. More calories - more bulge.

I found the chart on a website called "Information is Beautiful" and it was created by David McCandless.

On my website, you can click on the chart and it will open up to a larger size. You should open up the chart or print it out and look at it while you listen to this.

The chart is divided into four quadrants with the amount of calories running up the y-axis (from bottom to top) and the amount of caffeine running along the x-axis from left to right. So, an item high in calories is a large mocha frappuccino. MMMM. That must taste great. But, a large mocha frappuccino also has 450 calories - and that's more than a one-liter bottle of coke. Whoa!

I'll bet you didn't realize it had that many calories! On the other hand, an item low in calories is black tea - just slightly above zero. The same is true for brewed black coffee or a small iced coffee. These have almost no calories at all. But add a little milk to your tea or coffee and you pick up about 20 or 25 calories.

Caffeine is measured in milligrams. Decaffeinated coffee - also known as decaf - has almost no caffeine at all. The caffeine in decaf is not zero - but it's about as close as it gets. Brewed coffee (the coffee you make with a filter) is much higher in caffeine - and the more you drink, the more caffeine you get. A cup of brewed coffee has around 200 milligrams of caffeine. A large cup of brewed coffee could give you 300 milligrams.

Since the graph is laid out in a quadrant, we can see the relative amounts of both caffeine and calories.

Let's take a look at what's in the lower left corner. These are the items are low in caffeine and low in calories. So if you like the taste of coffee but you're watching your weight and you're avoiding caffeine (maybe its late in the evening and you're planning on getting a good night's sleep) well, you should probably drink decaf. But did you know you might be able to have an espresso? Espresso? Like me, you probably thought espresso was the drink that gives you a buzz - that has a lot more caffeine than filtered coffee. Espresso is made by forcing hot water at high pressure through coffee. As a result espresso is coffee in a concentrated form. It tastes strong - because it is strong, with even more caffeine than brewed coffee. But a shot of espresso is only about 30 milliliters in size and so it only contains around 50 milligrams of caffeine. Less quantity means less caffeine. If you drank a coffee mug full of espresso, then you would catch a big buzz because you'd be taking in so much more caffeine than you would from a regular cup of coffee. Green tea and black tea are also fairly low in caffeine (around 60 milligrams) and, obviously they have no calories. Interestingly, Coke is also fairly low in caffeine - though higher in calories. Coke has around 30 milligrams of caffeine and about 120 or so calories.

OK. So you need a buzz, but you're watching your weight. You'll find what you're looking for in the lower right quadrant: drinks that are high in caffeine but low in calories. A large cup of brewed black coffee has about 250 milligrams of caffeine and almost no calories. Iced coffee has even more caffeine in it (perhaps because it has more coffee in it): around 300 milligrams.



Frappuccino and Whipped Cream (photo by [Adrika](#) on



Making Espresso (photo by [Mark Prince](#) on Wikipedia.com)

In the upper right corner, you'll find the drinks that deliver a good buzz and taste great. But you might not have been aware of how many calories they have. So, check out the large iced cafe mocha. By the way: do you know what a cafe mocha is? Well, it's similar to a latte - it consists of one-third espresso and two thirds steamed milk. But a mocha also has chocolate added to it; sometimes cocoa powder or sometimes chocolate syrup. Anyway, a large iced mocha has 250 milligrams of caffeine (which can give you a pretty good buzz) but also 400 calories. Watch out for the bulge. A cafe mocha has more calories than a cafe latte - probably because of the added chocolate. According to the chart, a large latte has around 300 calories. I wonder why the large latte is also lower in caffeine.... Maybe its the chocolate in the mocha also adds a bit more caffeine to the mix.

Now we turn to the upper left corner, and we see the items that are low in caffeine but high in calories. A large hazelnut mocha with whipped cream! About 150 milligrams of caffeine (same as a large cappuccino) - but 600 calories. That's as many calories as you get in a MacDonald's Big Mac. OOOFF! I'd say avoid the drinks in the upper right quadrant. They tend to be expensive and they're pretty useless. They basically do for you what a nice big wedge of pie does: give you a great sugar rush and a lot of extra calories that you really don't need.

So I'd like to end by saying that what I've learned from looking at this chart is that, in terms of coffee, size matters. Even though it's true that the caffeine content is higher in espresso than in filtered coffee, it's really the amount you consume that really determines how much caffeine you are getting. The iced drinks are higher in caffeine because they start with more coffee to begin with. And when it comes to calories: watch out. On the other hand, it's nice to learn that with coffee (and tea) a good thing in its purest form has no calories at all. The calories come from all the stuff people add to make the drinks sweeter, thicker and richer.

Well I think I could use a nice hot cup of coffee right about now. So that's all for now from Extend Your Listening on What's For English Dot Com. I'm Gerald Wright.



Cafe Mocha (photo by [Sellington](#) on Flickr.com)

