

Caffeine use may result in depression, anxiety

A&M prof to release research results

By James A. Johnson

Of The Battalion Staff

People who think it's harmless to consume caffeine could be in for an emotional letdown.

But if Dr. Larry Christensen has his way, victims of depression could prevent or decrease oncoming symptoms of the illness by withdrawing caffeine and added sweeteners from their diet.

Christensen, a professor in the Texas A&M psychology department, has been doing research for the past year concerning the effects of these two additives on people's behavior and mood.

Although caffeine has typically been viewed as a tool for clearer thinking and a way to alleviate drowsiness and fatigue, Christensen's study emphasizes that both caffeine and carbohydrates (like refined sucrose, but not cellulose or Nutrasweet) may affect or trigger anxiety and depression.

Christensen's experiment indicates that a diet without the two additives can reduce emotional distress for certain individuals, especially those who have a history of clinical depression.

He said it doesn't always take large consumptions of either additive to affect behavior.

"She told me that a little while after the experiment, she was sitting with her family around a table (at her home) and began laughing for the first time in months."

— Dr. Larry Christensen, Researcher

"Some may think it takes tons of sugar to have an impact, and it's not true," he said.

His study involved 20 subjects. Ten were labeled as the experimental group (or responders) while the other 10 were the control group (nonresponders). The entire project, which included gathering data and performing the actual experiment, lasted 18 months. Each participant was required to submit a \$50 deposit which was refunded after completion of the experiment (which took about one month per subject).

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65 and included both men and women who volunteered after reading newspaper ads that called for individuals who

felt depressed, but didn't know why.

Ads also requested people who felt tired despite getting a lot of sleep, and individuals who were moody and felt bad most of the time. Twenty-five percent of the subjects were A&M students.

All subjects answered questionnaires that required participants to define symptoms, medications currently used, illnesses and types of treatment received, descriptions concerning the cause of symptoms, and finally, an assessment of the diet's impact on mood and behavior.

Those who abstained from caffeine but didn't show signs of improvement in mood stayed on the treatment diet and filled out depression and mood questionnaires.

Because the study consisted of subjects who experienced depression frequently, Christensen explained that healthier people may be affected differently.

"You've got to know how to select out the people in order for the diet to benefit them," he said.

Although a person's diet can severely alter his behavior, Christensen said that diet doesn't cause depression in every depressed individual.

"Because of outside factors, it's difficult to always tell what causes depression," he added. He did agree, however, that the old saying "You are what you eat," is true to some degree.

Dr. Steven Peterson, associate professor of medical pharmacology and toxicology at A&M's medical school, said withdrawal of caffeine may also have adverse effects on an individual, causing anxiety.

"People who have consumed large quantities of caffeine may experience withdrawal symptoms a while after they've quit consuming it," Peterson said.

He added that it is possible for caffeine to have an effect on people who don't have a history of depression.

"If it (caffeine) does, it's probably pretty minimal," he explained.

However, Christensen's study had eye-opening results. Sixty percent of the experimental group claimed the experiment made a positive impact on their moods. Twenty percent reported that abstaining from caffeine and added sweeteners helped at least some, while the other 20 percent detected no major change.

Aside from minor deviations from the rules — such as a few people having an occasional snack — most participants followed the required guidelines well, Christensen said.

She said one woman volunteered for the study because she got so depressed that she quit her job. In addition to having routine symptoms, she would sit in one place for a long time and do virtually nothing, he said. But within a week after the experiment, her abstinence from caffeine resulted in a reversed emotional state.

"She told me that a little while after the experiment, she was sitting with her family around a table (at her home) and began laughing for the first time in months," Christensen recalled. "It surprised her family."

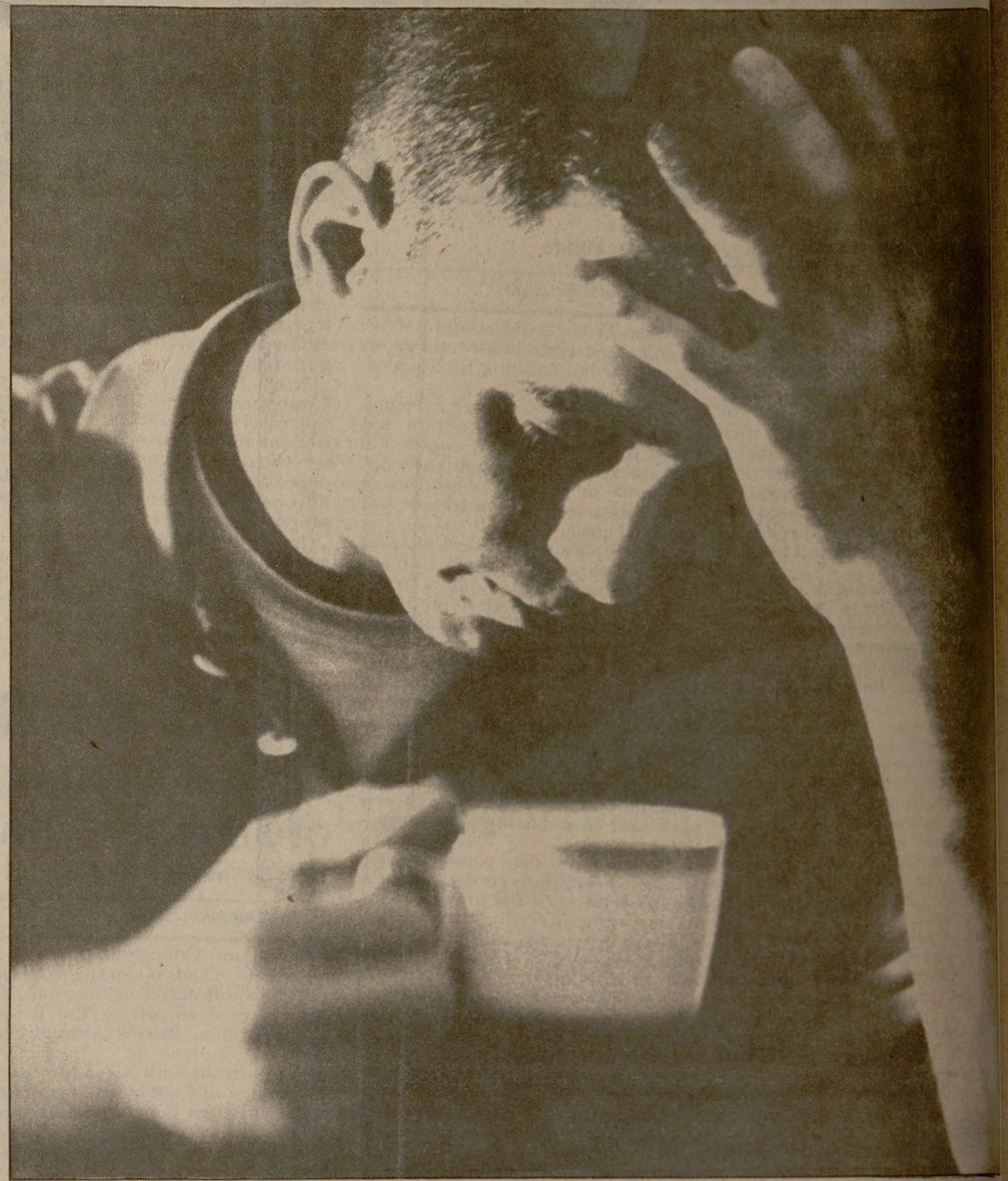


Photo by Jay James

Caffeine is widely used to keep late-night studiers awake and even to help improve their concentration. But overuse of caffeine can cause depression and anxiety for some.

He said his method is just one way to treat the illness. "This is just one treatment," he said. "It by no stretch of the imagination is the cause of depression."

The caffeine/sucrose approach concerning depression is so new that it has never been published, he said.

But because of his strong commitment and degree of confidence in his work, Christensen believes that his results will be released in the near future.

"It may be an uphill battle, but we will continue working until it's published," Christensen said. "It's as good as any other therapeutic intervention with depression and this system is much shorter."

Those who are interested in being part of the search may contact Dr. Christensen in Room 248 of the Psychology building.

Restless Heart plays Friday in G. Rollie



Restless Heart

By John Righter

Of The Battalion Staff

Country music is changing, and lead singer and guitarist Larry Stewart of Restless Heart is ecstatic that his group is helping shake country out of its longtime doldrums.

"For a country artist it is really exciting to see this growth in the variety and styles," Stewart explained during a phone interview. "You're finding successful new artists who are playing both traditional and contemporary country, plus you still have the established acts."

"There's a new excitement on the streets in Nashville. Country music has not given its fans enough credit over the years. The fans wanted something more than just a one-track sound, and this exciting for us to help contribute to this new direction. Country is definitely cool again."

The members of Restless Heart, who will be playing Friday night at G. Rollie and White with Billie Joe Royal and the Boys, certainly represent the new generation of country/pop acts, though the style has been appar-

ent in contemporary/pop music since the inception of rock.

In the past, bands that fused country and rock were either labeled as adult contemporary (the Eagles and America), or southern rock (Lynyrd Skynrd and .38 Special). It wasn't until Hank Williams Jr. started mixing traditional country with southern rock that the music industry realized the combination was as marketable for country as it was for rock.

With their three albums and four number-one singles, Restless Heart has perfected the country/pop sound, rising from a collection of session men to a top country crossover act currently headlining their own tour after just three albums. Plus, their fourth release for RCA, *Fast Moving Train* is finished and scheduled for release early next year. Stewart describes the unreleased album as a continuation of the growth developed on '88's *Big Dreams In A Small Town*.

"*Big Dreams* was made after performing live a lot and developing the sound we like through trial and error on stage. We like to perform our songs live and to develop them in front of an audience before we put them on vinyl. See Restless/Page 6

Aggie Players conjure 'Blithe Spirit'

Performers find British humor, attitude challenging

By Cray Pixley

Of The Battalion Staff

Wit, whimsy and mischievous spirits run rampant in the Aggie Players' production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit," beginning at 8 p.m. today in Rudder Forum.

Coward's comedic farce concerns mishaps that occur when English novelist Charles Condomine invites an inept medium, Madame Arcati, to hold a séance in his home so he may collect first-hand material for a novel he is writing. Arcati unwittingly conjures up Condomine's long-dead, yet lively first wife, Elvira.

Elvira actively takes pleasure in tormenting Charles and his second wife, Ruth. The comedic verbal interplay is heightened because only Charles can see Elvira. His seemingly one-sided conversations with his spirited first wife infuriate Ruth, much to Elvira's glee.

Through a blunder on Elvira's part, Ruth winds up as a second apparition to plague the harried Charles. The tangled trio wrangles with each other with arguments, accidents and jealousies, but always does so in the stylish and controlled manner so indicative of the British.

"Coward is a chance (for the actors) to use styles of language that they learned in acting class," says Dr. Michael Greenwald, director of the play. "He is a language-orientated playwright where words are used as weapons."

"There's a lot of fighting in this play, but it isn't just for the sake of argument, but to see who is wittier — who can throw that well-worded insult at the other."

Greenwald said the most challenging and interesting aspect of the play for the actors is to successfully deliver Coward's lines.

"With Coward, you don't get points for what you say, but how you say it," he says. "For the American actor, the first instinct is to use raw emotion and volume during the emotional scenes. The British are very keen on keeping an exterior coolness and not giving in to their passions, which is exactly the opposite with Americans who are very open and free with their emotions. The British don't like to show



Photo by Kathy Haver

Jon Burke (left), Mary Ellen Brennan and Ginny Green conjure up spirited fun in the Aggie Players' production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit," which opens at 8 tonight.

that emotion," Greenwald says. "It is a sign of losing to show that emotion. I think a lot of the real comedy in this play, and others like it, is the tension between wanting to give in to the emotion and the pressure not to give in. There is the tension of seething on the inside, yet trying to keep a calm exterior."

"The fun is when the emotion comes exploding out."

Those involved with "Blithe Spirit" echo their director's comments about the nature of Coward's wit.

"The people in Coward's world think and react so much faster than we do," says Ginny Green, who portrays Ruth. "They are so witty and bright. They pop out answers lightning quick."

"We also have knock-down, drag-out arguments, but the importance in Coward's work is to never lose control. You must always be in control and ready with a witty comeback during these arguments. We can't give into the natural emotion of the fight."

Jon Burke, who plays Charles, agreed. "Once you give into the emotion, the words are just words. You lose the sophistication and meaning of the lines."

Mary Ellen Brennan, who puts the play's chain of events into motion as the medium, says the language of the play is what moves it.

"There are no terrific physical or shouting battles," she says. "It is who can top the other with smart cut-downs."

"My character is really wacky, and I'm having the most fun I've ever had with this character. The British way of speaking also has been one of the challenges."

The cast has been preparing for "Blithe Spirit" for about nine weeks and has listened to tapes to help them with British accents.

For Sara Waak, who plays the mischievous spirit Elvira, the challenge is in playing a wraith, and in getting Coward's wit across to the audience.

"It is fun tormenting Charles, but I also have to stay low-key at times so as not to take attention away from

the other characters," Waak says. "Blithe is a fun character. She's always floating in and out and trying to win back her husband."

"It may be a bad pun, but Elvira is a real free-spirit," she says. "Elvira is a self-centered character, but she also reminds Charles of the times they had when she was alive."

This comedy of spirits and repartee also showcases Aggie Players John Mabry, Amy Jimenez and Jessica Lowe.

Set design is by Jimmy Phifer, with lighting design by Bert Wenck. Susan Kelly is the costume designer, and Lanell designed the hair styles and makeup.

"Blithe Spirit" will begin performances will then continue Nov. 15-18. Tickets are available at the MSC Box Office. Prices are for students and \$5 for the general public. For more information, reservations contact the Box Office at 845-1234.