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Addicted to more than love

Despite caffeine's ability to reduce fatigue, it can have adverse effects on the body, mind

By MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
 Staff writer

There is a Colombian drug lord who has swept the country by storm. His powerful drug has caused millions of people to become addicted.

His victims include not only college students, but children, parents and even professors.

Drug houses have emerged in major metropolitan cities — a few exist in College Station, with a promise of more to come.

His empire is not restricted to one type of product.

The name of this infamous drug lord is Juan Valdez, of the powerful Colombian Coffee family, and his drug is caffeine.

The first use of caffeine dates back to 2700 B.C. with the Chinese Emperor and today is basic part of the human diet.

Many college students have added caffeine to their meal plans, trying to cope with late nights and early mornings.

Caffeine, a mild central nervous system stimulant, is commonly found in coffee, tea, soft drinks and chocolate and is also found in many non-prescription drugs.

It occurs naturally in leaves, seeds and fruits of more than 60 plants.

This stimulant can increase reaction time, alertness, memory and temporarily increase mental function. It reduces feelings of tiredness and fatigue, and for some, it can enhance metabolism by helping the body burn fat for energy.

Caffeine is also a diuretic, which causes an increase in urination.

This causes the body to release water, vitamins and minerals.

Contrary to popular belief, it does not make up for declining performance due to lack of sleep, and it will not sober an individual who has consumed too much alcohol.

In the last decade, extensive research on caffeine has been done.

In relation to cardiovascular diseases, cancer and birth defects, caffeine presents no significant health hazards from natural consumption.

However, sensitivity to caffeine may increase due to pregnancy.

Dr. Jane Cohen, the Health Education and Nutrition Specialist at A.P. Beutal Health Center, said students should be aware of how much caffeine they are consuming.

"Caffeine is OK in moderate amounts," Cohen said. "It is better to get your sleep than to rely on caffeine before the test."

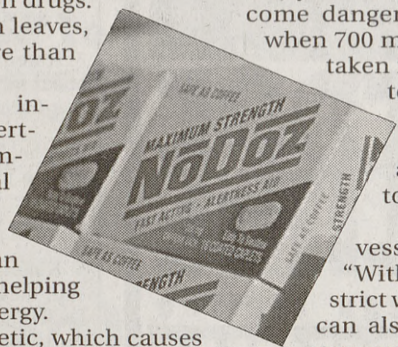
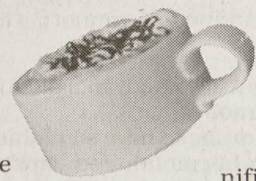
Erin Tarter, a nutrition assistant at Beutal and a senior nutrition major, defined normal usage for caffeine.

"Three cups of coffee and two soft drinks a day are normal," Tarter said. "It can become dangerous and may even be toxic when 700 mg to a 1000 mg of caffeine are taken in a day. That would be seven to 10 cups of coffee."

Tarter said the symptoms from overuse of caffeine vary among individuals according to their sensitivity.

"Caffeine causes the blood vessels to get bigger," Tarter said. "Without the caffeine, they constrict which then cause headaches. It can also cause people to be jittery, nauseous and lightheaded."

PLEASE SEE **CAFFEINE** ON PAGE 4.



Photography by
 Derek Demere
 and Dave House

For most students, smoking proves a harder habit to break than suspected

By CHRIS MARTIN
 Staff writer

Smoking on college campuses is a fact of life. It may not be healthy, it may not be attractive, it may not even be cool anymore, but it is here to stay.

The legal battles may rage on in the courtroom, but there is a decidedly different story in the classroom.

Many students who smoke are finding the habit of smoking far harder to shake than expected.

Jordan Scharf, a senior mechanical engineering major, began smoking three years ago, when first privileged by the freedom of college life like many students.

"I was living on campus, and I used to sit out on the balcony dorm with a bunch of guys to hang out and listen to music," Scharf said.

"Everyone would go out there to smoke, so I would join them. It's how I met a lot of people."

Scharf said he currently smokes about a pack a day, usually between classes or when he is sitting around.

He has tried to quit smoking several times, but has never fully kicked the habit.

"My roommate smokes, and I would always see him smoking," Scharf said. "That makes it hard to quit."

Money is a key motivator

in persuading students to quit smoking, Scharf said.

"At a pack a day, it costs around \$14 a week, \$700 a year," Scharf said. "After that there's not much [money] left. That's a lot of money for a college student."

The onslaught of health warnings surrounding cigarettes and tobacco use have not impeded Scharf's smoking habit.

"I'm more addicted to the habit of putting it [a cigarette] in my mouth. Nicotine has a little to do with it, but it's mainly the habit."

JORDAN SCHARF
 SENIOR MECHANICAL
 ENGINEERING MAJOR

"It's not exactly healthy stuff, especially when you get sick because it takes a lot longer to feel better, and you also have the coughing," Scharf said.

"You have to take the good with the bad. It's definitely a choice, and you know the risks before you start."

Scharf said he feels nicotine plays a minor role in his decision to continue smoking.

"I'm more addicted to the habit of putting it in my mouth," Scharf said. "When I'm not smoking, I'll stick pens in my mouth because I'm so used to it. I'm sure nicotine has a little to do with it, but it's mainly the habit."

Scharf said he enjoys the camaraderie of the smoker community most of all.

"I've met quite a few people from just hanging out and smoking," Scharf said. "It gives you something to say to people you would have no other reason to talk to."

"I smoke when I'm stressed," he said. "Sometimes it gets me more stressed and jittery if it's a bad situation."

"Other times I smoke when I'm studying. I'll take a break for five or 10 minutes, and everything seems OK. It's not so much the smoking — it's the friends and situations."

Mel Bartlett, a junior agricultural economics major, began smoking three years ago.

"I'll smoke after tests, sometimes before or on my break at work," Bartlett said. "It's mainly to relax."

Bartlett acknowledges there are many disadvantages of smoking.

"I usually think about the health risks, but right now I'm young and not going to worry about it for a few years," Bartlett said.

PLEASE SEE **NICOTINE** ON PAGE 4.

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