

Forum: Caffeine Allergy

Faith Elkins, Donald Farver, Ivan L. Rolim, and Georgia Janisch

Abstract

Medical Veritas has published on pages 252–260 of Volume 1, Issue 2 a manuscript by Ruth Whalen entitled *Ongoing caffeine anaphylaxis: a differential for mental illness* which presents an informative and complete summary of the action of caffeine in the body and some of the consequences. A. Hoffer, MD, PhD, FRCP(C) comments, “It supports my view which I have had for many years that too many are suffering from caffeine overdose. As a rule I advise all my patients to decrease their coffee to zero if they can, but never to have more than one or two cups daily. I recall one of my patients who drank forty (40) cups of coffee each day and suffered from severe chronic anxiety. Compounding the toxic effect was the sugar she added to each cup. Schizophrenics do drink too much and this is often encouraged by the hospital and the coffee machines in their lobbies. I know of one patient who consumed thirty (30) cups daily and needed 30 milligrams of haldol merely to overcome the effect of the caffeine. When the coffee was stopped the dose of medication was decreased sharply. The family estimated it cost them US \$2000 each year to pay for the coffee and the drug needed to counteract the effect of the coffee.”

We now present four experiences of individuals as they each recall how their lives were personally affected by caffeine allergy; how the drugs used to treat mental illness were ineffective, and the change that occurred after finally discovering they were sensitive to caffeine.

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Keywords: caffeine allergy, bipolar, mental illness, coffee

My 30-year experience with caffeine

Faith Elkins

3671 S. Livernois
Rochester Hills, MI 48307 USA
Phone: +1 248 852 8259
Email: hellothere@wowway.com

Abstract

Until just over two years ago, nightmares, rapidly shifting moods, suicidal urges, auditory and visual hallucinations, and twitches that sent food flying off my fork were a daily part of my life. My personality was disturbing, to say the least, so I had few friends. Every job evaluation I got, whether in teaching, as an Air Force officer, or at General Motors, stated some variation of “poor judgment.” Big chunks of time are missing from my memory, and acquaintances often had to tell me what I had said or done the day, the night, or the week before. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, but none of the medications made me stable or stopped the sometimes overwhelming urge to end my life. It was only when I read an article about how caffeine allergy mimics mental illness and stopped using caffeine that my life changed. Now, I don’t have nightmares, mood changes, ever think about suicide, or take medications. I’m developing some friendships. I assiduously avoid using caffeine, because I love having an ordered mind and feeling in control of my behavior. I also have a modicum of hope for a brighter future.

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Keywords: caffeine allergy, bipolar, mental illness

I believe that my troubles with caffeine might have started during my sophomore year of college. One night, in an effort to stay awake to complete an assignment, I bought a box of No-Doz[®]. I took two. Twenty minutes later I felt no different, so I took eight more. An hour later, when I still felt exhausted, I declared, “Well, I paid for them; I’m not throwing them out.” Impulsively, I took the remaining forty pills. I quivered and threw up for three days, or so I was told—I remember none of it. I don’t remember throwing up, I don’t remember my roommate and her friends trying to get me to drink ginger ale, and I certainly don’t remember a doctor coming to my dorm room. I do remember learning later that caffeine in large doses is toxic and that had I not thrown up, I might have died.

After graduation, I accepted a teaching job in South Carolina. The nightmares were so bad that I saw a doctor and

begged for sleeping pills, which he prescribed for me, and I started getting some counseling from a Baptist minister, who quickly determined that my problems were too complicated for him to solve so he referred me to a psychologist. When I admitted to the psychologist that the rage I felt was almost overwhelming, and that I had purchased a gun, he suggested a program of intensive therapy in a hospital setting.

I admitted myself for a three-week program at a hospital in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where I was tested, questioned, and counseled. They determined that I had low self-esteem and taught me something about self-talk. Previously, if I spilled a drink, for example, I would denigrate myself for hours over it. They taught me just to clean it up and determine to place the glass where I won’t knock it over instead. They did not address the nightmares or the feeling of wild panic I carried

with me always. The advice helped a little, but black moods still frequently came upon me, alternating with nervous, joyful excitement punctuated with bursts of laughter.

I fell in love with someone and he with me. For a time, my troubles seemed fewer. He took a job in Columbia, South Carolina, so I followed him there and in a short while we got married. It was difficult. I had an explosive temper and would throw objects as well as tantrums. I taught for a year, then decided to be a radio disc jockey and enrolled in a broadcasting school in Charlotte, NC. A week before I would have graduated, I panicked and ran away to Nashville, planning to become a country singer. I got a job working at Johnny Paycheck's club as a waitress. I worked there for two nights and learned that being a "drinks" waitress didn't play on my strengths. The job lasted only those two nights. I called my husband, who drove to Nashville to get me, and returned to Columbia.

I got a job teaching in West Columbia, but once the school got their funding for the year, the special education program was dismantled, so I was let go. I joined the Air Force on a whim and then came home and persuaded my husband to join as well. That was the end of our life together. He and I went off to basic training (my recruiter lied to me and said I couldn't get into officer training school unless I was enlisted first) and on to technical school, he for six weeks and me for six months. He went on to his first assignment in Wyoming while I finished technical school. I had a blast. The pace suited my high energy level and I achieved the top student leadership position—red rope. Even marching in formation a mile to school and back in the snow and bitter cold was fun. My husband told me that he had decided to become a Lutheran minister and I told him in no uncertain terms that I was a preacher's kid; I would not become a preacher's wife. I started divorce proceedings, but he refused to sign the paperwork. Not only did he love me, but a divorce would have made his ministerial ambitions pointless.

Officer training school wasn't much fun. There was a lot of study and a far more sophisticated level of social interaction. I found myself left out. I was welcome in a study group and at the club downing drinks, but no one sought out my company for companionship, probably because I was argumentative, melodramatic, and immature. In addition, I "spaced out" a lot, and I'd find myself in the middle of a conversation having no idea of what had been said previously.

Technical training school came next. Back to Chanute Air Force Base I went, but this time, I walked to school and back alone. I studied alone, went to the movies alone, and went to one party, where even in a crowd of at least a hundred, I was alone. I felt unable to connect to anyone and unable to pursue any one activity for very long. In the six months I was there, I took ten ballet lessons, about ten hours of flying lessons, a few months of karate lessons, and rode along with the police for a month or so. I had an affair with my karate teacher, and my husband started divorce proceedings. At the end of training, I went to my first assignment in England. My divorce was final three months into my stay there.

I found it difficult to be an officer. I felt like I was fourteen, with no idea of how to grow up. I talked too much, I interrupted too much, and I spaced out too much. I also jiggled or fidgeted when I should have been still. The whole experience was a

struggle, and although I loved being in England, I felt unappreciated and wholly inadequate as an officer.

Three years later, I returned to the states. I was assigned to Pope Air Force Base, which is in the middle of the army base where the 82nd Airborne Division and the Special Forces train. I joined the Green Beret Parachute Club. I did have a good time, drinking and playing pool with the special forces guys, jumping out of helicopters, but I did not make Captain and was expelled from service.

I found a job working for General Motors, as an assembly foreman at a truck plant in Michigan. At some point, and I have no idea what prompted me to do so, for my memories of that time are spotty, I consulted a therapist, who referred me to a psychiatrist, who diagnosed me as bipolar and put me on Lithium and another drug whose name I forget. It made me slow, thick-tongued, and thick-witted, and I declared that I'd rather die than live like that. I cast the diagnosis aside and went on my merry, half-crazed way. I continued to make rash decisions. At the time, I still had periods of utter euphoria when I felt capable of anything, when I spent money as if there were no tomorrow and made incomprehensible decisions, alternating with feelings of utter worthlessness when everything in the world was ugly and I withdrew from everything.

A few years later, I attended a church service with my grandmother and found God. I embraced Christianity and became a devout Pentecostal. The gift of tongues eluded me, but I was convinced that if I just tried hard enough to please God, I would be blessed with some kind of wonderful ability, so I fasted and prayed. At first, I fasted my lunch hours, then a day at a time, then three days at a time, then a week at a time, and my final effort was to fast for three weeks. The cramping as I starved myself was excruciating toward the end and I relented and ate after nineteen days. I had incredible hallucinations during that period of my life. I saw a giant demon, I felt the presence of an angel, and I heard God speaking to me on several occasions. I remember two times in particular. Once he said, "Go get your Bible" and on another occasion, he said, "Don't buy the potato chips." He spoke in a man's voice, quite clearly, into my left ear. My craziness had simply taken a different form, but I was still manic and, when the dark moods settled on me, said things that hurt and offended people. The minister encouraged me to leave the church. I never went back to that one or attended any other on a regular basis.

I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder again. I had come into a session with my therapist and was morose and slow, utterly depressed. A week later, I was manic, talking a mile a minute, and banging the side of my hand against my knee. The therapist looked horrified and said, "What are you doing?" I replied that it hurt and that hitting it helped. I often hit myself, mostly when I was angry with myself for blurting out yet another thoughtless opinion or unnecessary comment, or for making yet another unwise decision. I would lock myself in a restroom stall and punch myself in the stomach. I was aware that the act seemed hardly rational, but it was more rational than striking someone else. I already had financial troubles; hiring a lawyer to keep me out of jail wouldn't have helped at all.

My doctor tried to put me on Lithium, but I refused, and was given Depakote[®] and Zoloft[®], with Ativan for especially tense times. I became suicidal, and after about nine months, the rest-

less leg syndrome I developed from the Zoloft[®] was unbearable. I was prescribed Paxil[®] instead, and the restless legs came back after about three months. At one point, I purchased a miracle weight loss drug, and after about three days of taking it, my head was spinning so fast, I couldn't function, so I started taking Ativan to calm down. Sixteen Ativan[®] pills later, I was finally calm, but I wanted to make sure that wasn't too many to wake up with, so I called my doctor, who had me transported to the hospital. There, they made me drink charcoal slurry and throw up. The ambulance personnel had gone through my purse and found my suicide note. It had not been intended for that evening, but a thorough suicide note takes awhile to compose, so I had written it months earlier and was carrying it in my purse for when I finally couldn't battle the urges anymore. I knew that at some point, I would kill myself, but I thought it laughable that they would think I'd try to do it with a measly sixteen Ativan. Through judicious use of them, I'd managed to accrue nearly 150 of them. At any rate, I was sent to a local mental hospital, where I spent about a week while they changed my medicines to Neurontin[®] and Effexor[®]. I didn't have as much trouble with those two. With Depakote[®], my hair had fallen out a lot. I was exhausted, though, from lack of sleep. I would have nightmares and wake up every hour and a half or so, until I finally pleaded with my doctor to give me something to help me sleep. He prescribed Desyrel[®] for me, thinking it might help correct my sleep cycles. It did help a lot. I often slept through the night and the nightmares were less frequent, although I still had them several nights a week.

I continued with therapy. It was pleasant to talk to someone, but didn't seem to really help a lot. My moods were still all over the place, I still felt pulled to end my life several times every day. I was exhausted and wanted to just lie down and quit. At night when I went to bed, I saw spiders scurrying across my pillow. The first few times I saw it happen, it freaked me out. I would leap out of bed, turn the pillow this way and that, and shake out the bed sheets. I never found a spider, so I came to realize that I was hallucinating them. I frequently heard noise in my head, like being in a dorm room where the muffled din of a half-dozen radios and televisions can be heard. I never told my therapist or doctor about the hallucinations, fearing psychotropics strong enough to induce tardive dyskinesia.

I was also getting lost several times a week. I would be driving down the road and suddenly not know where I was. Nothing would look familiar. I would forget the names of common items and have trouble finishing my sentences. These incidents frightened me so much that I consulted my regular doctor, who sent me to a neurologist, who determined that I was experiencing fugue states because of the bipolar disorder.

In the throes of my sickness and exhaustion, I accepted a buyout from General Motors, probably the dumbest thing I've ever done in my life, in order to work on my second husband's start-up hockey magazine. The magazine failed, we went bankrupt, and I started going from one short term job to another as I got crazier and more out of control.

Then, a little over two years ago, I stumbled upon Ruth Whalen's article on caffeine allergy. It struck a chord with me

and I stopped using caffeine. I had been accustomed to drinking one or two cups of caffeinated coffee in the morning, and then consuming several cups of strong tea throughout the day. In the summer, I would drink a half-gallon of iced tea every day. Giving it up wasn't easy, but the allure of sanity was a powerful inducement for me. I told my therapist that I was giving up caffeine and I was also giving up the Neurontin[®] and the Effexor[®], as they weren't helping me. She was concerned that I would bounce into a manic cycle within a few weeks and insisted that I come see her more often during the transition.

I didn't bounce into a manic cycle. After about three or four weeks, I felt something shift in my thinking. All of a sudden, I felt like an adult, finally. My thoughts didn't race, and my speech wasn't pressured. As the days went by, I found myself NOT compelled to offer an opinion or a comment on every thing I heard or saw. I was calmer physically, not fidgeting. My nightmares went away; I stopped taking the Desyrel[®] and still slept through the night. After about six weeks, my therapist regarded me with a quizzical expression and said, "Maybe you were misdiagnosed. Maybe you don't have bipolar. Maybe you have a personality disorder instead."

"Maybe so," I said. "And maybe I have a caffeine allergy." I gave her a copy of the article. I saw her once a month for a year, and my mood continued to stabilize. I haven't thought about suicide in over two years. I threw the suicide note away after a time and started to have some hope for the future, but I grieve for my life as it should have been. I feel as if for the past thirty years, I've been in a whirlwind. Now I have to deal with the heap of rubble that is my life.

I managed to stay out of jail and to remain physically intact despite a penchant for speed and a reckless disregard for my body's limitations, but I quit the best paying job I ever had, I let my teacher certification lapse, and my ill-thought out decisions made a wreck of my finances. I have no savings, a mortgage that's more than the house is worth, and no career. I've so far been unable to land a permanent job, so I work for a temporary staffing firm as an accounting clerk. More than a fourth of what I make goes to pay for my health and dental benefits. I don't see how I will ever recover financially from the thirty years of bad decisions I've made and I still have no faith in my ability to make a good life decision.

I am caffeine allergic, I avoid caffeine, I'm sane and I like it that way. Although my dreams are still imaginative and colorful, they're not frightening and I haven't had any incidents of suddenly not knowing where I was. I did recently see a spider scurrying across the bed, but when I swatted it, it made a juicy mess, so I know it was real. I've been singing with the community choir. I'm a member of Mensa and I attend a few activities every month. I feel accepted, I know that I'm liked, and I'm developing some friendships. In the past year and a half, every place I've been on assignment has raved about me, and I'm proud of that. I don't know what the next few years will bring, but I know that if I stay away from caffeine, I'll be okay.

Coffee? No, thanks.

Finally, at age 51 I discovered I am caffeine allergic

Donald Farver

Email: donnycakes@yahoo.com

Abstract

I believe I became severely sensitive to caffeine before I was born due to my mother's high intake of caffeine products. During my life, my thinking was compromised, preventing me from engaging in normal, productive activities that tend to offer an individual a sense of accomplishment in life. I never thought of saving money. Caffeine's influence on my cognitive thinking prevented my normal development and completely altered my mindset so that I became a different person. While under caffeine's influence I was euphoric. Decreasing caffeine, while causing my thinking to improve, mimicked depression as I reflected on my past, trying to understand why I did things that did not make much sense. Psychiatric doctors shrugged off the possible connection between caffeine use and depression. For some persons, caffeine reacts as a powerful psychoactive drug. Proficient doctors who might have recognized my symptoms early on could have saved me a tremendous amount of grief.

Keywords: caffeine allergy, depression

Recovering from a long-term illness that I previously did not know I had and only recently recognized has depressed me. This depression is partly due to the condition itself and partly due to the realization that I was physically ill for a large number of years. Despite seeking treatment from a number of doctors, my condition worsened with continued caffeine intake.

I am caffeine allergic. I believe that I was born with this allergy that contributed to my spending most of my life trying to focus and process accurately. All I can do is speculate as to how this caffeine allergy came about. I have learned that while pregnant with me, my mother ingested a lot of chocolate, tea and coffee. Somehow, I believe this caused my developing brain to become severely sensitive to caffeine and I likely developed a cerebral allergy to it before I was born. As I aged, my thinking was compromised, preventing me from engaging in normal, productive activities that tend to offer an individual a sense of accomplishment in life. My not understanding the source of my symptoms and further not knowing what change was necessary to alleviate the symptoms resulted in feelings of despair and contributed to feelings that my condition had destroyed my life.

I spent a lot of time living a cycle, the up and down world of caffeine highs and withdrawal lows. When under caffeine's influence, I was euphoric. Nothing seemed to bother me. I was happy. Despite what was happening, I was so "high" that it was highly improbable that I would become sad while in this up state.

During these times, I would reflect on my past and try to understand why I did things that did not make much sense. Decreasing caffeine caused my thinking to improve, but I experienced many down times with caffeine reduction. After obsessing about something that seemed incongruent with my personality, I shrugged it off only to focus on some other bizarre behavior that I had engaged in, and then I went on to use more caffeine, which put me back into a euphoric state.

And so the cycle continued: Caffeine caused euphoria and withdrawal mimicked depression. Unfortunately, this cycle

continued for over thirty years without any doctors providing an accurate diagnosis and detecting the true reason for my illness.

During one of my withdrawal lows, I spent time in a psychiatric ward. There, I questioned doctors about the possible connection between caffeine use and depression. They shrugged my questions off, treating me with disrespect and belittling my intelligence, as happens to many psychiatric patients.

Earlier this year, I read about caffeine allergy. The information immediately threw light on my life. Realizing that I might suffer from allergic toxicity, I stopped ingesting caffeine. However, I fell into a deep depression as the days went by and I realized that I am caffeine allergic and was grossly toxic for many years.

Now at age 51 and recovering, I understand that I have never known myself and never had the chance to accurately use my natural brain. At my early age, caffeine, a legal psychoactive drug, stripped insight, focus and opportunity just as every other psychoactive drug reacts. This is a big fish to swallow for many, especially me, caffeine's victim, a middle-aged man who never intended on becoming high.

Under caffeine's influence, without my natural cognitive skills, I performed tasks, including elementary and high school work, below my performance level and rushed them. Knowledge of this has caused me a tremendous amount of sadness and guilt. Not only have substandard performances affected my life, causing the loss of educational, personal, social and financial opportunities, but my being out of touch with reality for many years affected persons around me.

Presently, I am still recovering. I grieve when I think about how caffeine has negatively influenced my past and what could have been with proficient doctors who might have recognized my symptoms early on. Stopping the caffeine in itself didn't cause the depression, but rather the awakening to reality as my mind was clearing up.

For some persons who are sensitive to caffeine, caffeine functions as a very powerful drug.

My life: before, during and after discovering I was caffeine dependent

Ivan L. Rolim

Rua Pinheiro Machado 103/402
Laranjeiras
Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil 22231-090
Phone: 21 25537948
Email: ivanrolim@yahoo.com.br

My life before caffeine dependent life (1980 - 1994)

In 1980, shortly after I was born in Fortaleza, Brazil, my parents noticed I was a healthy and active boy, yet somewhat unfocused. A restless child, I was always on the search for adventure. My parents were concerned enough to take me to a pediatrician. Later, I saw a nutritionist who prescribed Targifor-C and other vitamin supplements. A local doctor diagnosed me with slight ADHD (attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder), but also noted that I had a higher IQ than the average students in my class.

My high grades in school demonstrated that I was a bright student, so my parents thought of transferring me to a more advanced school in southwest Brazil. This transfer never materialized.

I maintained good grades at school but was not very socially active. I avoided people and made few friends because I disliked the way most people thought. I preferred to create my own world. Also, there seemed to be other struggles within my family, my brothers and I did not agree on things, and a relative manifested a drinking problem, situations reinforcing my keeping to myself.

In the 1994 era of video games and computers, I started drinking coffee and Coca-Cola® and eating cheese cubes. In my mind, these things were good. Also, they appeared to increase social relationships. Several platonic loves and a few activities with girls made me happy. Nevertheless, no matter what happened when I was lonely, I used to feel okay and on target with my life. Through my computer I could learn English, programming languages, and enjoy a profound hobby in the vast gaming world. To keep up with these activities, I ingested additional Coke® and chocolate.

In 1998, continued caffeine intake caused me to become fat—78 kg (172 pounds). It also may have contributed in part to some eyesight problems including -4° of nearsightedness and even some floaters. The eyesight problems were additionally attributed to a game I played at 13-years old whereby I would spin myself around with all my force some 10, 20, even 30 times, like a break dancer. I would practice spinning by myself on a patio, or sometimes do it in a group that also used to play volleyball. I was also involved in jogging a lot during school breaks.

My grades had fallen from average to low, and the time was quickly arriving when I would need to take a test and apply to a nearby university. At this time, it was common for individuals to exercise at gyms while listening to classic songs like those performed by the *Village People*. I decided to dedicate myself to aerobic activity and to a fasting diet. At first, it was okay: 6 km (3.7 miles), 4 times per week, some days eating vegetables and rice. But monotony set in and soon I was filled by a desire to be slim again. I increased caffeine intake by 3 cups of coffee per day, sometimes adding Guarana powder. As the weeks passed, I measured my weight. Believing I had not lost enough—I went from jogging to sprinting, always trying to achieve a faster pace. The endorphins produced from this vigorous exercise made me feel so good! Most of the time at home, I managed to study chemistry and

math despite having a somewhat foggy mind and a minor music obsession.

My life during caffeine dependent life (1998 - 2002)

Soon, I weighed 62 kg (136 pounds)—I had lost 16 kg (36 pounds) in just three months. I was very happy and active again, but feeling “high.” People appeared to be distant. Often I was thinking obsessively and resorted to counting car license plates or being on a computer—just looking to the monitor or restarting the system. Even games became monotonous. Sometimes I spent whole nights just reconfiguring the system. Some of these compulsions still persist today (2004).

I felt a strange sensation, like that of a watery brain, as if my head was being flooded. Some nights I felt a surge of stress that made me think I was dying. I had panic attacks. During one of them, I almost fainted. The crisis was monthly.

A doctor at a private hospital said I was just “anxious” and that my heart was healthy. Another doctor prescribed an ansiolitic.

Unaware of what the real problem was, I started eating as before. But sweets were savagely eaten! I just didn’t understand the connections. Still, the sweets were very good. Mint and Halls were my favorite “attention helpers.”

I became chubby and inactive again. This time, I had no interest in studying as before. Therefore, in 2001, I started another diet plan, and had symptoms of depression. My parents couldn’t help me out of it, and neither could other activities such as soccer, drinks, silly TV soap operas and local music. I had no desire to date.

Soon, ongoing caffeine poisoning was giving me the symptoms of a “heavy mass” in my forehead that caused a foggy mind. Days passed with a lack of a deep sleep and a high dependence on music. I ingested any legal stimuli I could find, and had little incentive to keep myself active.

My psychotherapist diagnosed me with depression and gave me anafranil, an antidepressant. Soon I liked it, to the point I was asking for more! Because he didn’t recommend additional anafranil, and because of my dislike of the treatment program, I gave up going to his sessions.

The doctors really found little time to talk about my life goals and my diet. The second psychotherapist noticed I was “more inner than outer” and prescribed carbamazepine, an anti-convulsant. This caused symptoms of laziness and depression. I slept 13 hours a day.

Of course, I wanted my focus back. After ingesting Coke® and some caffeine, I read better but sometimes needed to focus two or three times on the same line of a book to understand it!

No longer a teenager and with ADHD worsening, I decided to try to research my problems on my own. Bipolar depression, OCD, dysthymia, schizophrenia, epilepsy, Alzheimers, amyotrophic sclerosis—they were all on my mind for months! And a relative, a

neurosurgeon, just laughed at me, saying I was not intelligent enough to diagnose myself. Sometimes he ignored me altogether. *Great, no help from family*, I thought.

Thank God, I had an aunt who took care of me when my parents traveled to the southeast Brazil. Nights with music, some gaming, and news reading on the net were my activities. It was clear I couldn't take care of myself. Due to my lack of attention and inability to find work, I was very dependent of others.

I had dreamed of becoming an American teacher of astronomy and physics. But the real life is much harder than that. A few times when I was more focused, I studied until exhaustion set in. In the meantime, my few close friends were traveling around the globe to work and learn new cultures. When I attempted to learn new things, though, soon the brain fog arrived and only after many hours of using the computer did I feel normal again. Finally, I became somewhat more secure with my parents back home. I felt calm and a little comforted on a daily basis.

At the university, I studied by myself, achieving low grades due to a lack of attention span and often a robotic manner. It was as if I was high on drugs most of the time. Any different event, such as a girl flirting with me, or a new teacher showing some interest, was marked in my notebook while I listened to music so that I might remember the situation forever! Wow! It was so nice!

No one in my family understood that I was using depression to focus more, as well as to stay awake at night. They became worried that my mind could be deteriorating quickly!

With 2002 in place, I did not give up. I started sunbathing between classes, as it gave me pleasure and had a calming effect on my head. I was always running against the clock with no real reason—confused, counting numbers, and obsessing about useless things all the time (mostly in the afternoon). Wherever I went, I always had a Walkman or CD player going. I preferred to sleep during the day, while the nights seemed to be better for studying.

Relationships seemed to dissolve. Three different girls I had known were depressed because of my cold and silent heart. Without realizing it, I stressed each of them. My egocentric life only turned things worse.

Soon, depression increased and I visited other psychotherapists, each time hoping one would understand me. I told them my history and what I thought about my situation. Two of them just called me plain crazy because I referenced Coke[®] and coffee as the culprits, aside from my anger “to feel the moment now.” One of them prescribed an anti-psychotic, which I didn't take. Others prescribed lithium and other drugs. After taking carbolithium for a month, an anti-convulsant for two months and an anti-epileptic for several weeks, I gave up trusting them, threw the pills out a window, and took 5 to 10 anafranil pills at once.

My mental state was very strange, but I thought I was so normal. I really liked the sunbathing, the cups of coffee before going to class, and my manic states.

I went searching the Internet to brainstorm and find clues about my situation. I wondered, did I have schizophrenia? Maybe ADHD? My mom said I had full potential, as the high IQ test had shown. Was I coming down with Alzheimers? Did caffeine play a role in fogging my mind and causing watery-pressure in my brain? Did I have celiac disease or perhaps a malformed brain?

All my previous diagnoses were incorrect, not to mention the 10 different medications that were of no value. While some of these made me feel calmer and more stable, I was not able to really function. I am thankful that I didn't go to a mental ward—certainly my medical insurance would have paid for such procedures during my panic attacks. In medieval times, I might have been executed!

Then one day, the 23rd of October, 2002, I found information concerning caffeine allergy on the Internet. This changed my life.

My life after caffeine detoxification (2003 - Present)

Neither my family nor physician suspected I suffered from caffeine intoxication. I felt so introverted and my thinking was so foggy that I resolved to abandon all products containing caffeine. I stopped taking medication in the first month and this started detoxifying the brain. I started eating proper foods, taking vitamins, and drinking water instead of other cold drinks.

During a medical exam, I asked the doctor how I might detoxify my brain of caffeine and recover the blood brain barrier (BBB). He laughed aloud, saying “Don't ask me about things that you don't know!” When he started to suggest a psychotherapist, I avoided this field of conversation.

Hundreds of days have now passed since my avoiding coffee. I feel younger and my skin is sleeker and I feel strong. Moreover, my face had become more sensitive to touch during caffeine detoxification. Also, I can now close my eyes and start thinking of people running, colors changing and sounds in an amazing speed! I documented all recovery experiences on my computer, including the times I had a pressure in my nape (massaging caused relief), which was a warning sign of an impending panic attack. During caffeine detoxification I felt like banging my head to relieve stress in the muscles in my head.

My eye floaters are not as noticeable as before, and my near-sightedness didn't worsen. However, my stomach got bigger, as I used to drink 7 liters (1.85 gallons) of water daily, mixed with almost 10 ounces of milk powder. The need for water has been present since my first month of detoxification.

I used to cry and get emotional when listening to lovely Irish music. I was in a chronic prison of sadness, and now I understand how caffeine allergy played a role in causing my depression to feel the environment and blunt the stress. This experience has helped me to have empathy and understand why others may get stressed over simple things in life and recognize the harmful effects of stress in the modern world.

I've set my goals pursuing a career in technology. I'm now enrolled in a private university, following my own pace, with an open mind to change if needed. I'm learning German on my own. Thus, I consider myself healed of caffeine.

It seems that each individual's experience with caffeine allergy is somewhat unique. On day 630 and forward, I started to experiment by eating a few chocolates and drink Coke[®] to see if any kind of allergy or reaction would develop. Instead of avoiding caffeine entirely, I am able to tolerate these items now without an acute reaction! I continue to feel okay and active, without foggy thinking, but occasionally give in to junk food binges.

I feel so much better when eating now, but am aware of overdoing. The smells of things like mint, strong perfumes, and even new materials like sheets and plastic tended to decrease my obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) symptoms during these months (I don't know why). Proteins like beans and meat appear to fog my mind. Since coffee tends to cause some anxiety for hours, I now avoid it altogether. Presently my diet includes lean chicken, rice, and mostly a good portion of vegetables as well as the junk food (that contains glutamate).

So, I've learned the lessons not to use caffeine while fasting, not to mix caffeinated products to focus more, and more importantly, do not use caffeine before a long session of aerobic activity. Caffeine could be worse for people with ADHD, even setting off suicidal tendencies.

Caffeine: useful stimulant or biochemical disruptor

Georgia Janisch, RD

1514 Dayton Drive
Janesville, WI 53546 USA
Phone: +1 608 754 2000
Email: gjanisch@charter.net

Abstract

“We’ve found your problem, Mrs. Janisch,” the doctor said impatiently, “and it’s all between your ears.” His abrupt diagnosis, and the manner in which it was delivered, was a devastating blow. Too humiliated and too embarrassed to go home and tell my family, I drove to a nearby park, got out of the car and walked to a secluded spot along a river’s edge, where I sat down and sobbed. It was July 1974. I was 29 years old.

Following a healthy lifestyle, I have been well for 31 years. However, my twin has been held in bondage with chemical restraints for 40 years, diagnosed with schizophrenia, and denied the right to grow.

Keywords: caffeine, diet, blood-sugar, hypoglycemia, twin, schizophrenia

“We’ve found your problem, Mrs. Janisch,” the doctor said impatiently, “and it’s all between your ears.” His abrupt diagnosis, and the manner in which it was delivered, was a devastating blow. Too humiliated and too embarrassed to go home and tell my family, I drove to a nearby park, got out of the car and walked to a secluded spot along a river’s edge, where I sat down and sobbed. It was July 1974. I was 29 years old.

My symptoms had begun to surface the year before, just a few months after the birth of my second daughter. Starting with post-partum depression and fatigue, the symptoms increased in number and in severity week by week and month by month until a precipitous weight loss frightened my physician enough to admit me to the hospital for a thorough exam. He suspected that a brain tumor might be the reason for my decline. I looked anorexic.

Because I was too weak to walk without help, I didn’t go home from the clinic appointment to gather any belongings. Instead, I went straight to the hospital.

Suffering from extreme insomnia, I lay awake nights, shaking and waiting for the inevitable spontaneous panic attack. My heart would race out of control and beat so loudly that I thought it would jump out of my chest. Accompanying the frequent episodes was a feeling of impending doom. I would also try desperately not to press my tongue against my loose teeth for fear that I would find them on my pillow when I awoke, if I should be so lucky to doze off for a moment or two. During the day, I would wait nervously for the next test and look suspiciously at hospital personnel as they walked in and out of my room. I wondered what they knew that they weren’t telling me. A few days later, I found out.

Although my teeth were loose, tests revealed an abundance of calcium in my blood. A brain scan ruled out a tumor, and nothing conclusive could be found. My symptoms were diagnosed as psychosomatic illness. I was told to avoid dairy products and was referred to a psychiatrist.

A psychiatrist? How could my psyche cause fatigue, weakness, mood swings, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, joint pain, loose teeth, the inability to concentrate and to focus, bouts of amnesia, insomnia, tachycardia, vision problems, stiffness, numbness, dizzy spells, neuromuscular problems, PMS, attention deficits, hyperactivity, indecisiveness, impatience and

rapid weight loss? And if my psyche *were* responsible, how could it be fixed?

Twelve years earlier, my twin brother had been diagnosed as mentally ill. He was 17-years old. After several court appearances over alcohol-related behavioral problems, a series of psychiatric evaluations was ordered. He was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia, declared incompetent, made a ward of the state, drugged, and forced into institutions. What happened to him was criminal. He became a zombie.

Oh my God! Was this going to be my fate, too? Were my problems genetic? I pushed my face into the hospital pillow, grasping it with both hands as though I were hanging on for dear life, and prayed, “God, if you are real, please get me well now, or let me die now, but don’t leave me like this—a vegetable!”

Three days later, I met with the psychiatrist. He prescribed sleeping pills and a tranquilizer, and told me to schedule another appointment. The following day, however, after experiencing an episode of disassociation, a symptom of psychosis where the mind seems to disconnect from the body, I made a desperate but fateful decision. I chose a different path.

Twenty-four hours later, I was on a flight to Houston, Texas—2000 miles from home. Meeting me at the plane with a wheelchair was the doctor who would change my life. He was controversial. His focus was nutrition. In the ’70s, those kinds of doctors were called “quacks.” Today, we call them “alternative.”

His diagnosis was “reactive hypoglycemia”—i.e. low blood sugar. You can imagine my surprise—yet relief—to learn that the major cause of my debilitating symptoms was self-induced—but not by my psyche. Rather, the cause of most of my symptoms had come from the cumulative, aggravating effects of two substances I had been consuming for years: sugar and caffeine—sweets and sodas. Both affect and exhaust the blood-sugar-regulating system. That same system produces and regulates hormones—the chemicals that control the way we think, feel and behave. My symptoms were not a mental illness, but rather mental and emotional effects in response to a biochemical disturbance exacerbated by unhealthy lifestyle choices and habits.

Withdrawing from sugar and caffeine, two highly addictive substances, is not an easy task. However, as one college professor who had recovered from the devastating effects of hypoglycemia said, “With or without help, the person with hypoglycemia must have treatment, or his life will become a living hell.” [1]

My brother’s life is a testimony to that statement. Several glucose tolerance tests and three physicians confirmed his diagnosis of hypoglycemia as far back as 1977. His every behavioral problem resulting in admission into a mental hospital is traceable directly to the cumulative effects of alcohol or caffeine.

My brother and I began consuming copious amounts of sugar and caffeine at a very young age. Our mother worked nights, leaving us in our father’s care. Our father liked alcohol, and he took us along to taverns, where we feasted on candy bars and soda pop.

Today, my brother and I are 61 years old. I recovered. My brother still lingers in a mental institution.

Tragically, conventional psychiatry has refused to acknowledge that the effects of alcohol and caffeine on hypoglycemia can cause what mimics mental illness, and that antipsychotic medications can exacerbate the condition.

My brother continues—in an institutional setting—to consume caffeine (coffee, sodas, chocolate and his prescribed daily aspirin), eat a high-carbohydrate institutional diet, and ingest eight potent psychiatric medications a day. He lost most of his teeth by age 30. He has attempted suicide twice, a known side effect of his antipsychotic medications. The injuries left him with one kidney and damage to his stomach, liver, and intestines. To make matters worse, his medications are documented in the Physicians’ Desk Reference to be toxic to the liver and kidneys. He developed neuroleptic malignant syndrome, another potentially fatal effect of his medications. He has had seizures, yet another drug side effect.

Tests revealed that my brother had a stomach pH of 9.0, which is extremely alkaline. Normal stomach pH is acidic (somewhere between 1.0 and 3.0); the high alkalinity is another side effect of his medications, confirmed by the doctor who did the test. He suffers from chronic constipation, an adverse effect of six of his medications. Dehydration, another adverse effect of his three antipsychotic medications, causes a constant thirst. When he compulsively guzzles water and other liquids to quench his thirst, the psychiatrists diagnose that behavior as another symptom of mental illness—polydipsia—and his water intake is monitored and limited.

Catatonic state, confusion, depression, drowsiness, emotional instability, excitement, hallucinations, jitteriness, listlessness, memory impairment, mental disorientation, nervousness, restlessness, rotation of eyeballs, shuffling walk, and exacerbation of psychotic symptoms are documented side effects of the neuroleptic medications—all of the traits, which my brother exhibits, we have come to associate with schizophrenia. Aren’t these the traits the drugs are supposed to correct? Aren’t these the symptoms of caffeine poisoning?

To assist in his recovery from the second suicide attempt (two bullets in the abdomen), my brother was taken off all medications. He convalesced in the community hospital for several weeks and was provided a healthy blood-sugar-

regulating diet. He was not given caffeine or sugar-laden foods. His recovery was short of a miracle, and he was symptom-free. His social workers and psychiatrists, however, refused to acknowledge the extreme improvement. Instead, they considered the act of suicide another symptom of mental illness. He was transferred back to the institution and again drugged. He immediately regressed. It was a devastating blow.

Serving as my brother’s guardian and registered dietitian, I have attempted to correct his diet, but to no avail. Without my knowledge, the court system removed my rights to make any decisions regarding my brother’s medications. One nurse was ordered to take away the protein drinks I attempted to give my brother and flax oil was denied for his severely cracked skin. Moreover, the psychiatric team treating my brother filed a complaint to remove my license to practice.

My brother and I are twins with the same medical condition, but with different diagnoses, different treatments, and different outcomes. Following a healthy lifestyle, I recovered and have been well for 31 years. However, my twin has been held in bondage with chemical restraints for 40 years, diagnosed with schizophrenia, and denied the right to grow. His symptoms were diagnosed as a mental disorder; mine, as mental effects of a physical disorder. His therapy treated “symptoms”; mine—the “cause.”

Extremely sensitive to caffeine and sugar, I must avoid both. One sip of caffeinated soda or bite of chocolate would cause me to lose focus, induce hyperactivity, make my heart race, and remove my natural state.

I have had the opportunity to counsel many individuals suffering from the effects of sugars, caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. Diabetes is well known, but hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and dysglycemia (unstable blood sugar) are given little or no attention. Yet, my research reveals that the majority of mental, emotional, cognitive and behavioral problems can often be linked to a disturbance in the blood-sugar-regulating system (the endocrine glands) and is usually initiated or exacerbated by poor diet, poor lifestyle habits, chronic stress, and/or addictive substances of abuse, including nonprescription and prescription drugs. This link has been known and documented for decades; it is no secret, but it has been shrouded like a well-kept secret.

I used to ask myself, “Why the ignorance?” and then later, “Why the resistance?” I don’t ask any more. I simply find it difficult to comprehend the motives for denying simple nutritional treatment to so many.

As Barbara Reed Stitt wrote in her book, *Food, Teens & Behavior*, “The question is no longer, ‘Is there a diet and crime connection?’ but rather, ‘How long will we let this tragedy continue?’” [2]

I have learned the wisdom of these words spoken by my physician and mentor: “We must control our chemistry, or our chemistry will control us.” [3]

References

- [1] Clemmer, James H. Jr., “The Torments of a Hypoglycemic,” *Prevention Magazine*, January, 1977.
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- [3] The late Keith S. Lowell, D.O., M.D., Houston, Texas.