



DRINK

Decaf deep dive

BY LINDSAY OXFORD

No one starts off drinking decaffeinated coffee. It's something most of us adopt grudgingly, sick of insomnia or chastised by doctors.

I'm fighting my own personal battle with caffeine, but I haven't been able to cut out coffee completely. I like to stay awake past 1 p.m., you see. Though I love tea, it's not a sufficient substitute. On the other hand, I don't want insomnia and the jitters. So like many people, I have legitimate health reasons to give up real coffee. For whatever reason Postum (a coffee substitute made from wheat bran) never took off—which is a shame, because its mascot, Mr. Coffee Nerves, was probably the best-worst mascot ever. (Look him up. You won't be disappointed.)

Anyway. Decaf.

Friends assure me that good decaf exists, and I tried roughly a dozen from local roasters in search of one I'd drink daily.

The decaffeination process may seem obvious, but just in case: Caffeine is removed from coffee beans after harvesting, but before roasting. At various times, caffeine was extracted using benzene (a component in plastic production), ethyl acetate (think nail polish remover) or methylene dichloride (paint thinner). Apparently, the boiling point for these solvents is much lower than those needed for the coffee, so

they should be completely gone before the end of the extraction process.

Still, if the idea of known carcinogens terrifies you as much as it does me, take heart: There are also water-based methods that remove caffeine, and pretty much all of the coffee roasters in town use some form for their decaf.

Thaleon Tremain, CEO of Pachamama Coffee Farmers, summed it up nicely: "If you seek better decaf, try a decaf that is certified organic, ensuring that chemicals were not applied to your coffee."

Pachamama's is indeed a better decaf. In fact, it was my favorite in a month's worth of decafs. It goes toe-to-toe with my favorite black coffees: smooth and full, with the slightest chocolate tone at the end of each sip.

Old Soul's decaf Ethiopia Sidamo came in a close second. It didn't have the bitterness that a good number of other local decafs couldn't seem to shake, and I found I could drink it without the constant reminder that I wasn't getting caffeine. To my taste buds, it drank slightly brighter than Pachamama's, so depending on what you're looking for, these are two solid choices.

I'm still not excited about completely cutting caffeine—I may never do so. But knowing I can swap out half of my normal coffee intake and still sleep at night is comforting. □

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