This Is the Worst Time of Day to Drink Coffee

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(Image credit: Ryan Dausch)

If the best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup, then you're starting your day completely wrong. With apologies to the country's best-selling ground coffee, some dietitians are now suggesting that none of us should be stumbling straight out of bed and directly to the coffee pot — regardless of what brand we're brewing.

According to Laura Cipullo, registered dietician and best-selling author, getting our caffeine fix first thing could cause us to feel nervous and jittery by mid-morning, then like we need a nap before lunch. And the culprit isn't the coffee itself (or even the caffeine), but one of our own hormones: cortisol.

Research shows that cortisol levels spike shortly after waking, then fall, then peak again at midday. After that, they drop, peaking again in the early evening — conveniently, about the time that we're all trying to make our way home from the office.

Since our levels of cortisol (the so-called "stress hormone") are highest in the mornings, Cipullo suggests that adding caffeine might make us feel extra rattled.

Neuroscientist Steven Miller agrees. If you are "drinking caffeine at a time when your cortisol concentration in the blood is at its peak, you probably should not be drinking it," he wrote. Not only can drinking your daily cuppa first thing make you feel jittery, but over time it can also make the caffeine less effective at delivering that much-needed boost.

(Image credit: Natalie Grasso)

So, what should you do instead?

"Definitely limit coffee when you first wake up," Cipullo told CNBC. "Have coffee when the body is producing less cortisol, about three to four hours after waking." That means if your alarm starts screeching at 7 a.m., you should be ready for your first cup by late morning.

What neither Cipullo nor Miller explain, though, is how we're supposed to deal with other people for those three or four hours. Don't they know what people are like?

What time do you drink your first cup of coffee?