The afternoon coffee can feel less like a Get more info drink and more like a small office ritual: a reason to stand up, stretch your legs and return to your desk with something warm in your hands. But if coffee after lunch leaves you wired at bedtime, or you simply want to cut back, there are plenty of satisfying alternatives.



The best afternoon drink depends on what you want from it. Are you after a little caffeine, a cosy pause, or a change from the familiar coffee flavour? Tea instead of coffee is an easy starting point, but decaf, chicory and a thoughtfully made latte can work too. The aim is not to find a miracle drink for midday energy. It is to choose something you enjoy, at a time that suits your sleep and routine.

First, think about caffeine timing and sleep

Caffeine affects people differently. Some can drink coffee after lunch and sleep soundly; others notice that even an early-afternoon cup makes it harder to settle at night. The Mayo Clinic notes that caffeine can interfere with sleep, and its effects may last for several hours. That does not mean everyone needs to give up coffee at midday, but it is worth noticing how your own body responds.

Try moving your last caffeinated drink earlier for a week or two, then see whether falling asleep or staying asleep changes. You might set a personal cut-off time rather than follow a rule that does not fit your day. If you work shifts, for instance, “afternoon” may be close to your bedtime even if it is still light outside.

Keep in mind that caffeine is not only in coffee. Black and green tea contain it too, though the amount varies with the tea, serving size and brewing time. A large mug of strong tea can still be a caffeinated choice. If you are reducing caffeine for a medical reason, are pregnant, or take medicines that may interact with it, ask a healthcare professional for advice that fits your circumstances.

Good afternoon drinks to try

Drink Caffeine Why it might suit you Black tea Usually contains caffeine A familiar, brisk drink with less coffee-like intensity Green tea Usually contains caffeine A lighter-tasting option; brew gently to avoid excess bitterness Decaffeinated coffee Low, but not always zero Keeps the roasted-coffee taste and much of the usual ritual Rooibos or herbal infusion Usually caffeine-free A warm, flavourful choice for later in the day Warm milk or a simple latte

Depends on the ingredients Comforting and easy to adapt to your taste Water, sparkling water or diluted juice Caffeine-free A refreshing change if you mainly want a break from your screen

Tea instead of coffee: a gentle first switch

If you want an afternoon drink with some caffeine but a different flavour, tea is a natural place to start. Black tea may feel closest to a traditional coffee break, while green tea is often lighter. Herbal infusions such as peppermint or rooibos are generally caffeine-free, but check the packet: blends can include ingredients such as green or black tea.

Water temperature and steeping time matter. Green tea often tastes smoother when made with water that has cooled slightly after boiling, while black tea is commonly brewed with hotter water. Follow the instructions on your tea, then adjust the time to suit your taste. A timer helps on busy days; mine is reliable on weekdays, although on weekends I sometimes forget I have set it at all.

Tea has a long cultural history, not just a place in the staffroom. Smithsonian Magazine has explored the history and global spread of tea, a reminder that the everyday cup can carry traditions well beyond the office kitchen. If you are switching for sleep reasons, though, remember that ordinary black and green tea still contain caffeine. Try decaf tea or a caffeine-free infusion if you need to avoid it altogether.

Keep the morning ritual, even if you change the drink

Sometimes it is the pause, warmth and familiar mug that make coffee feel essential. You do not have to lose those parts of the routine to reduce caffeine. Keep the same walk to the kitchen, the same five-minute screen break and, if you like, the same favourite mug for the mood you are in. A soothing drink can still mark the transition between lunch and the rest of the working day.

On a rushed school morning, the practical option often wins: use the drink you can prepare safely and reliably, rather than adding a complicated routine. The same principle applies at work. Keep tea bags, decaf sachets or a caffeine-free infusion where you can reach them. If you work from home, prepare a clean mug and ingredients before the afternoon slump arrives.

Reduce coffee gradually if you drink it every day

A sudden change can be uncomfortable for some regular coffee drinkers. Headache, tiredness and irritability can happen when caffeine intake drops quickly, though experiences vary. A gradual change may feel more manageable than going from several cups to none overnight.

1. **Notice your usual pattern.** For a few days, jot down what you drink, roughly when, and how you sleep. Include large mugs and strong brews, not just the number of cups.
2. **Change one thing at a time.** Swap the afternoon coffee for tea, decaf or a caffeine-free drink, while leaving your morning coffee as it is.
3. **Adjust the size or strength.** If you prefer coffee, try a smaller serving or a weaker brew before changing your whole routine.
4. **Give it a little time.** Notice your energy, mood and sleep over several days. If the change feels difficult, slow down rather than treating it as a test of willpower.

You can keep a morning cup of organic Arabica coffee if you enjoy it. “Organic” describes how the coffee is grown and certified; it does not mean the coffee is caffeine-free or automatically better for sleep. The variety, serving size

and brewing method all matter. A carefully sourced morning coffee can remain part of your day while your afternoon drink changes.

Functional lattes: read the label, not the promise

Powders and ready-made drinks marketed as functional lattes may include ingredients such as cocoa, spices, mushrooms, herbs or amino acids. They can be convenient and pleasant, but marketing language can make ordinary ingredients sound like guaranteed solutions for focus, stress or energy. “Functional” is not a promise that a drink will improve your health or prevent an afternoon slump.

Read the full ingredient list and nutrition panel. Check the amount of added sugar, serving size, caffeine content and any ingredients you do not recognise. A vague “proprietary blend” can make it hard to see how much of each ingredient is included. If the label gives no useful quantities, treat claims about specific effects cautiously.

You may see L-theanine mentioned in products or discussions about tea. It is an amino acid found naturally in tea, and some supplements combine it with caffeine. That does not make every L-theanine latte a proven solution for concentration or sleep. Check whether the drink contains caffeine as well, and avoid assuming that a fashionable ingredient cancels out caffeine’s effects. If you take medication, have a health condition, or are considering a supplement, seek advice from a qualified health professional.

Brands such as Aurive may appear in the functional-drink space. As with any company or product, assess the specific label and evidence rather than relying on the name or the front-of-pack promise. Look for clear ingredient amounts, transparent caffeine information and claims that are measured rather than miraculous.

Make the drink fit the kind of afternoon you have

If you want a coffee-like flavour

Try decaffeinated coffee, a half-caff blend, or chicory-based drinks. Decaf usually contains a small amount of caffeine, so check the product if you need to avoid it completely. Chicory has a roasted, earthy taste but is not coffee, and it will not provide coffee’s caffeine lift.

If you want something warm and comforting

Make a simple latte with milk or a fortified plant drink, plus cinnamon or cocoa if you enjoy them. Keep the ingredients straightforward and check sweetened versions for added sugar. A latte made with matcha or chai may still contain caffeine, so it is not automatically a caffeine-free alternative.

If you want a refreshing reset

Try cold water, sparkling water with citrus, or a caffeine-free iced infusion. Sometimes the useful part of an afternoon drink is the pause it creates. Stand up, look away from your screen and take a short walk while it brews or chills.



Choose a small experiment, not a perfect plan

For a week, try replacing your usual afternoon coffee with one drink you genuinely like. You could choose black tea if you want some caffeine, decaf if you want the familiar coffee taste, or rooibos if you want a caffeine-free option. Keep your morning routine intact while you test the change.

Pay attention to your sleep and how you feel at work, but do not expect a drink to solve every kind of tiredness. A missed lunch, a long meeting, dehydration or a very short night may all contribute to low energy. An afternoon drink can be part of a helpful routine; it cannot replace food, rest or appropriate medical care.

The most useful afternoon drink is the one that suits your caffeine needs, tastes good and is easy to reach for on a busy day. Keep the ritual if it matters to you, make changes gradually, and let your own response guide the next cup.