



Effects of Alcohol, Coffee, Tobacco and Drugs on Shooting



The habitual use of alcohol, coffee, tobacco and various drugs is harmful to the average person and in no way promotes better body function or better shooting. Any drug which causes the body organs to perform their work at greater rates than normal fatigues them sooner and causes them to age more rapidly. Much has been written and said both pro and con concerning the habitual use of alcohol, coffee, tobacco, drugs and their temporary and permanent effects on the human body, both mentally and physically. Although all shooters are not in agreement that complete abstinence by habitual users is the solution, all will agree that these agents will in no way help to improve shooting performance or scores. The top shooters in the nation today unanimously agree that control is the most important factor in becoming a top competitor. Control can best be explained as the coordination of mental and physical effort, born in thought and culminating in a concentrated, precise action. This effort must be natural, unstrained and smooth flowing.

What can you the shooter do about sustaining control? When you find yourself having difficulty in maintaining your shot groups in the center of the target, you analyze and make corrections. Sometimes when control is declining, analysis may pinpoint some cause other than faulty technique in employment of the fundamentals. What did you have for breakfast? Two cups of coffee and two cigarettes are enough to ruin anyone's control. Whatever the reasons, they should be noted in your shooting journal just as you would enter unusual conditions at a match. In a short period of time, if you are honest with yourself, you will be able to piece together enough information upon which to take remedial action.



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Contrary to popular belief, alcohol acts as a depressant rather than a stimulant. It dulls the senses, lessens the desire to win, destroys coordination and lessens the shooter's ability to concentrate. Alcohol taken at the proper time and in the proper amounts might possibly lessen the shooter's anxiety, but by doing so, other effects are released that are far more harmful to the body and detrimental to the shooter's score. No one can say what the right amount is or when it should be taken. Some shooters may shoot a good score with a hangover. But, the second day is when the after effects become acutely noticeable, and the shooter's control may disintegrate on the firing line.

Many coffee drinkers say they cannot do without it as a pick-me-up during the day. But let us see what really happens after that coffee break. Dr. Rolf Ulrich, in his book *Coffee and Caffeine*, reports that after coffee consumption, mental tempo rises first and speeds of association increases, but there is a noticeable decrease in the quality of work being done. In test examinations, it was seen that the subjects finished quicker, but that false conclusions were more frequent. Reliability and accuracy definitely took a beating as a result of a coffee pep-up. Are you considering a change of pace drink, like tea? Before you do, consider this: It is not generally known that tea has large amounts of caffeine and tannic acid. The general effects of caffeine are cerebral, cardiac and diuretic (copious urination) stimulation. As to tannic acid, tea leaves have about ten percent, while coffee berries have only about five percent content. Tannic acid, when brought into contact with mucous membrane, acts as an astringent and diminishes its secretions. It coagulates albuminous substance and thus hardens animal source food matter in the stomach with which it comes in contact. A shooter should also stay away from the caffeinated colas. Caffeinated cola drinks, in addition to other caffeinated soft drinks, contain that well known perk-up ingredient, caffeine. The bottles of some brands contain a listing of cola contents which should serve as a reminder. Know them and avoid them while shooting.

Cigarette smoking should be avoided at all costs. Simply explained, it affects the body by initially, slowing the

pulse rate, increasing the pulse rate, increasing blood pressure and overworking the heart, reducing the oxygen capacity of the blood, causing shortness of breath, bringing on fatigue more quickly and decreases visual activity. The combined effects of nicotine and carbon monoxide explain why the shooter must avoid smoking if he is to shoot with the greater possible skill. The top competition today does not allow a margin of indulgence if you expect to win. Any shooter, whose goal is to become the best, must make a total commitment to this goal. Smoking is an obstacle to this goal. Can the shooter afford obstacles such as this?

Some shooters, no doubt, prescribe certain remedies for themselves when they have a cold, a stuffed-up nose or a headache. Most of the effects of the drugs found in these and other preparations are not conducive to good shooting. Most drugs are habit-forming and all are a deterrent to good health if used frequently without proper medical advice. A depressant slows reflexes, lessens the desire to win, promotes carelessness and causes loss of concentration and coordination. A stimulant causes nervousness, hypertension, increases heartbeat, excessive movement of the hands and trembling. Drugs affect different people in different ways, so dosage would be a problem even if they did any good toward reducing anxiety, nervousness, etc. Anytime medication or drugs are used that affect the body functions, there is a chance that the side effects will do more harm than good to the shooters performance.

There is no substitute for good clean living and a healthy body. Commit yourself and your shooting to doing everything you can to accomplish your goals.