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Energy Drinks: Power Boosts or Empty Boosts?

Slick packaging, edgy themes, exotic ingredients, and special formulas are all part of the hype about energy drinks. A growing number of beverages promise quick energy as well as performance enhancement and nutritional benefits to athletes, students, partygoers-anyone who wants a pick-me-up. Yet, claims about these products often are inflated while health risks such as dehydration, overstimulation, and the double danger of combining energy drinks with alcohol receive little attention.

What's behind these claims? Although the makers of energy drinks tout mixtures of vitamins, minerals, and tropical extracts, the main ingredient is caffeine. The difference between the caffeine in energy drinks and other beverages is the amount—many have at least as much caffeine as coffee and much more than soft drinks.

Caffeine Concerns

Caffeine perks up the central nervous system and provides the lift that energy drinks are all about. However, the high levels of caffeine in energy drinks can cause real problems, including dehydration— meaning the water and fluid level your body needs when exercising is more rapidly depleted through sweat and urination.

Caffeine also can speed up a person's heart and raise blood pressure. The amount of caffeine in energy drinks is not good for children. Caffeine may cause a child or young adult to become agitated, irritable, or nervous.

School starts early, activities and jobs create tight schedules, and nighttime often finds today's youth up late doing homework, listening to music, playing computer games, and instant messaging their friends. As a result, kids often do not get the sleep they need, leaving them more likely to reach for a caffeine jolt. In fact, the more caffeine kids consume, the less sleep they get.

Caffeine content in various drinks

Monster Energy	16 oz.	160 mgm.
Full Throttle	16 oz.	144 mgm
Coffee, generic brewed	8 oz.	range 102-200 mgm.
Rock Star	8 oz.	80 mgm.
Red Bull	8.3 oz.	80 mgm.
Amp	8.4 oz.	74 mgm.
Mountain Dew MDX	12 oz.	71 mgm.
Diet Coke	12 oz.	47 mgm.
Classic Coke	12 oz.	35 mgm.
Sprite, regular or diet	12 oz.	0 mgm.

Courtesy: Center for Science in the Public Interest

Keep Fluid Levels Up

Drink plenty of water before and after intense physical activity and smaller amounts in between.

For activities lasting more than an hour, try a sports drink. These products provide just the right amount of carbohydrates and electrolytes to replace fluids and keep your nerves and muscles moving.

What's in the Mix?

Other energy drink ingredients add to the possible problems. Vitamins, minerals, and herbs added to energy drinks may not be risky by themselves, but they could upset one's nutritional balance and could cause a bad reaction to medication.

- Guarana, or guarine, is a climbing plant, native to Brazil, which contains caffeine. Each fruit contains about one seed, which contains three times more caffeine than coffee beans.
- Taurine is an amino acid which is just now being researched. It is a possible cardiac stimulant and may enhance the effect of caffeine.
- Ginseng is actually three different herbs commonly grouped together; it is said to stimulate and relax the nervous system, lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and improve stamina but may cause headaches, restlessness, and raised blood pressure.
- Extra calories and carbohydrates. Finally, energy drinks contain carbohydrates that we need to fuel long exercise sessions. However, energy drinks provide more carbs than most people need for exercise. The result—excess calories—is just what we are trying to avoid or burn off. And because carbs make it harder for the body to absorb fluids, they can cause dehydration, especially in hot weather.

Alcohol and Energy Drinks....can you tell the difference?

Alcopops is a term used to describe an alcoholic beverage that can closely resemble an energy drink or soft drink. They are sweet and contain 4-7% alcohol by volume.



Alcopop

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Sources: <http://family.samhsa.gov/monitor/energydrinks.aspx>

http://www.noys.org/Energy_Drinks_and_Alcopops_final.doc

http://www.marininstitute.org/alcopops/energy_drink_report.htm