



Energy Drinks - Are they safe?

Energy drinks are the fastest growing beverage category in the United States, and these drinks are becoming increasingly popular among children and teens. Recently these drinks have gained media attention, with reports of increases in emergency room visits due to excessive caffeine intake and combining energy drinks with alcohol consumption.

What are energy drinks?

Energy drinks are a new breed of soft drink, heavily marketed to increase energy, alertness, performance and concentration. The primary ingredients in energy drinks are sugar and caffeine - both of which can provide a temporary energy boost.

Are energy drinks safe?

Overall, energy drinks are OK in moderation. Unfortunately, not all children and teens are consuming these new drinks in moderation. While an occasional energy drink is fine, many children and teens who are consuming three or four energy drinks a day which is not healthy. The risks associated with energy drinks include:

- Energy drinks contain excessive sugar and calories which may contribute to weight gain and tooth decay.
- Energy drinks are full of caffeine - a stimulant drug (stimulates the central nervous system).
 - Caffeine can cause the following side effects:
 - Jitteriness
 - Anxiety
 - Dizziness
 - Upset stomach
 - Headaches
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Caffeine's side effects are often made worse in combination with certain medications or supplements.
 - Caffeine can aggravate certain heart problems.
 - Caffeine is a diuretic, meaning it causes a person to urinate more - so it is a good idea to stay away from caffeine in hot weather or heavy physical activity to avoid dehydration.
 - Regular caffeine consumption may lead to caffeine tolerance, creating an unhealthy cycle of always needing more caffeine to achieve the same "lift".
 - Caffeine may also cause the body to lose calcium. This is of special concern among teens who often do not get enough calcium in their diets.
 - Energy drinks often contain ingredients whose safety or effectiveness have not been tested, including guarana (another source of caffeine), taurine (amino acid thought to enhance caffeine's effect), ginseng and other herbal supplements not regulated by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). These additional ingredients may cause health problems for people taking certain medications or with certain health conditions.

What is considered moderation?

Teens should try to limit caffeine consumption to no more than 100 mg of caffeine daily, and children should consume even less. In fact, consuming as little as 100 mg of caffeine daily can lead to caffeine dependence. With caffeine dependence, a person may develop withdrawal symptoms (tiredness, irritability and headaches) if he or she quits consuming caffeine suddenly. Teens and children should be aware that caffeine is found not only in energy drinks, but also in cola beverages, coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, energy gum and some over the counter medications. Even in moderation, caffeine should not be combined with alcohol or certain medications or supplements.

How much caffeine is in the following items? (source The Children's Hospital/Nemours Foundation)

Beverage or Food Item	Ounces/Quantity	mg of Caffeine (average)
SoBe No Fear	8 oz.	83
Monster energy drink	16 oz.	160
Rockstar energy drink	8 oz.	80
Red Bull energy drink	8.3 oz.	80
Jolt cola	12 oz.	72
Mountain Dew	12 oz.	55
Coca-Cola	12 oz.	34
Diet Coke	12 oz.	45
Pepsi	12 oz.	38
7-Up	12 oz.	0
Brewed coffee (drip method)	5 oz.	115
Iced tea	12 oz.	70
Chocolate milk	8 oz.	5
Dark chocolate	1 oz.	20
Milk chocolate	1 oz.	6
Jolt gum	1 stick	33

Cutting back on caffeine

The best way to cut back on caffeine consumption is to do it slowly, which will help alleviate withdrawal symptoms. Try replacing caffeinated drinks with non-caffeinated ones - water, milk, juice, clear sodas, and caffeine-free sodas, teas and coffee. You may feel tired at first - your body's way of telling you it needs more rest. Energy levels should return to normal in a few days.

So are energy drinks just hype?

While energy drinks may provide a temporary energy boost, over consumption will lead to jitteriness, anxiety, dizziness, upset stomach, headaches, difficulty sleeping and poor performance. ***The best way to boost energy comes from eating well, staying hydrated, and getting enough exercise and sleep. There is no short cut to healthy living! Take care of your body and it will give you the energy you need!!***