



ENERGY DRINKS: HEALTHY OR HARMFUL?

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iTriage

One claims to give you wings. One even touts that after drinking its contents you'll "Unleash the beast". You've got it; we're talking about energy drinks. But are these energy drinks safe? Energy beverages are the fastest growing segment of the beverage industry. In 2011, annual sales boasted a whopping 6.9 billion dollars, exceeding the gluten free industry at 4.2 billion claims Doris Piccinin, MS, RD, CDE, CD, a dietician and core nutrition faculty member at Bastyr University.

The real concern for parents and those indulging in these drinks is the amount of caffeine. Piccinin claims that the caffeine in energy drinks is not regulated. "The amount of caffeine in coffee is known, as well as the amount of caffeine in soda, but it is very challenging to find out how much caffeine is in energy beverages as it does not appear on most labels", says Piccinin. In late October, the Food and Drug Administration cited five deaths and one non-fatal heart attack to the highly caffeinated Monster Energy Drink. Forbes notes that, "a 24-ounce can of Monster Energy Drink supposedly has 240 mg of caffeine, approximately equivalent to seven cups of coffee."

What are the possible side effects of using energy drinks?

It really depends on the age group, claims Piccinin. "Young children are most susceptible since their organ systems such as liver and kidneys are not fully developed. Adults are more tolerant to high levels of caffeine with supplements that are found in energy beverages as they have fully developed liver and kidneys that help eliminate or detoxify these substances," says Piccinin.

Energy beverages can cause:

- Irritability
- Sleep disturbance
- Agitation
- High blood pressure
- Irregular heart beat
- Increased sweat

Tara Zimliki, Certified Personal Trainer and founder of Tara's Bootcamp offers 5 great alternatives to energy drinks.

Whey Protein Shakes. The average individual falls short of their daily protein requirements and this is often the number one reason for fatigue.

Drink water! We all need to consume a minimum of eight glasses of water daily to hydrate our bodies. If we are even a little dehydrated, our metabolism can slow down up to 3%.

Fresh fruit or green smoothie – Make a smoothie in the morning and give yourself a healthy boost of fruit sugar instead of caffeine.

Coconut water – Coconut water is loaded with potassium, in fact much more than any sports drink. Potassium helps to maintain water balance for hydration and helps trigger muscles to perform best.

Green Tea – With only a third of the caffeine as coffee, and a potent source of polyphenols, green tea is a good choice.

Bonus: Sleep more. Get some sleep! Aim for 6-8 hours per night. There is nothing more rejuvenating and energy boosting than catching some Zzzzs! So snooze away for plenty of energy for the next day!

Whether it's energy drinks you choose to consume or another form of natural energy, consumers need to be aware of all the possible dangers. Before you hit the convenience store for a boost of energy, do some research and make sure you are prepared for the possible side effects that may arise.