Energy Drinks

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Energy Drinks  
Energy drinks are widely promoted as products that increase energy and enhance mental alertness and physical performance. Next to multivitamins, energy drinks are the most popular dietary supplement consumed by American teens and young adults. Men between the ages of 18 and 34 years consume the most energy drinks, and almost one-third of teens between 12 and 17 years drink them regularly.  
  
There are two kinds of energy drink products. One is sold in containers similar in size to those of ordinary soft drinks, such as a 16-oz. bottle. The other kind, called energy shots, is sold in small containers holding 2 to 2 oz. of concentrated liquid. Caffeine is a major ingredient in both types of energy drink products at levels of 70 to 240 mg in a 16-oz. drink and 113 to 200 mg in an energy shot. (For comparison, a 12-oz. can of cola contains about 35 mg of caffeine, and an 8-oz. cup of coffee contains about 100 mg.) Energy drinks also may contain other ingredients such as guarana (another source of caffeine sometimes called Brazilian cocoa), sugars, taurine, ginseng, B vitamins, glucuronolactone, yohimbe, carnitine, and bitter orange.  
  
Consuming energy drinks raises important safety concerns.  
  
Between 2007 and 2011, the number of energy drink-related visits to emergency departments doubled. In 2011, 1 in 10 of these visits resulted in hospitalization.  
About 25 percent of college students consume alcohol with energy drinks, and they binge-drink significantly more often than students who don t mix them.  
The CDC reports that drinkers aged 15 to 23 who mix alcohol with energy drinks are four times more likely to binge drink at high intensity (i.e., consume six or more drinks per binge episode) than drinkers who do not mix alcohol with energy drinks.  
Drinkers who mix alcohol with energy drinks are more likely than drinkers who do not mix alcohol with energy drinks to report unwanted or unprotected sex, driving drunk or riding with a driver who was intoxicated, or sustaining alcohol-related injuries.  
In 2011, 42 percent of all energy drink-related emergency department visits involved combining these beverages with alcohol or drugs (such as marijuana or over-the-counter or prescription medicines).  
Bottom Line  
A growing body of scientific evidence shows that energy drinks can have serious health effects, particularly in children, teenagers, and young adults.  
In several studies, energy drinks have been found to improve physical endurance, but there s less evidence of any effect on muscle strength or power. Energy drinks may enhance alertness and improve reaction time, but they may also reduce steadiness of the hands.  
The amounts of caffeine in energy drinks vary widely, and the actual caffeine content may not be identified easily. Some energy drinks are marketed as beverages and others as dietary supplements. There s no requirement to declare the amount of caffeine on the label of either type of product.  
Safety  
Large amounts of caffeine may cause serious heart and blood vessel problems such as heart rhythm disturbances and increases in heart rate and blood pressure. Caffeine also may harm children s still-developing cardiovascular and nervous systems.  
Caffeine use may also be associated with anxiety, sleep problems, digestive problems, and dehydration.  
Guarana, commonly included in energy drinks, contains caffeine. Therefore, the addition of guarana increases the drink s total caffeine content.  
People who combine caffeinated drinks with alcohol may not be able to tell how intoxicated they are; they may feel less intoxicated than they would if they had not consumed caffeine, but their motor coordination and reaction time may be just as impaired.  
Excessive energy drink consumption may disrupt teens sleep patterns and may be associated with increased risk-taking behavior.  
A single 16-oz. container of an energy drink may contain 54 to 62 grams of added sugar; this exceeds the maximum amount of added sugars recommended for an entire day.  
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