

DRUG ARM Resource Centre

ENERGY DRINKS



What are Energy Drinks?

Energy drinks are non-alcoholic carbonated beverages which are available to the general population. These beverages are cleverly marketed and claim to increase your energy levels, improve stamina and increase your mental alertness and concentration. Consumers should be aware of the potential harm energy drinks may cause and individual responses to the ingredients found in these beverages.

Ingredients

The main ingredient found within energy drinks is caffeine; however other stimulants are also used including ginseng, guarana and ephedrine. Taurine, carbohydrates, gluconolactone, inositol, niacin, pantenol and B-complex vitamins can also be found in energy drinks. These key ingredients are all stimulants which target our central nervous system to speed up the messages to and from the brain so that the person feels an increase in alertness.

This does not necessarily mean our bodies have consumed more energy. The table below indicates how many kilojoules (energy) and caffeine we consume when we have an energy drink in comparison to other beverages.

Caffeine and energy comparison in different beverages

Per Can	Regular Soft Drink (375ml)	Regular Cola (375ml)	Regular Energy Drink (250ml)	Coffee Instant (150ml)	Coffee Espresso (150ml)
Caffeine Levels	0mg	49mg	80mg	60-80mg	90mg
Energy Levels	675kj	675kj	480kj	* 300-600kj	* 300-600kj

* when consumed with milk.

Effects to be aware of

The amount of caffeine found in one can of an energy drink is not usually at a level that would produce severe side effects; however energy drinks do not have the same effect on everyone. Below are some of the effects people can experience as a result of consuming too many energy drinks:

- A rise in body temperature
- Frequent urination and dehydration
- After the energy burst, an even greater feeling of fatigue
- Rapid heart beat (palpitations)
- Dizziness and headaches
- Restlessness and excitability
- Anxiety and irritability
- Trembling hands
- Sleeplessness

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Withdrawal

People may experience symptoms of caffeine withdrawal within a 12 – 24 hour period of consuming highly caffeinated drinks. Symptoms will include dehydration, restlessness and a decrease in reaction times.

Energy Drinks and Alcohol

Recent research has found people who consume energy drinks and alcohol have the capacity to misinterpret their level of intoxication which may lead to a further increase in high risk taking behaviour. Consuming the combination of a depressant drug and a stimulant drug may also falsely increase a person's confidence which may deceive them into undertaking potentially hazardous activities, such as driving a motor vehicle.

'in comparison to students who consumed only alcohol, students who consumed energy drinks mixed with alcohol had experienced a high prevalence of alcohol-related consequences including being taken advantage of sexually, taking advantage of another sexually, riding with a driver who was under the influence of alcohol, being hurt or injured and requiring medical treatment'

Who should avoid Energy Drinks

The Food and Drug Administration [FDA] does not currently regulate a recommended daily intake for energy drinks. Pregnant women should avoid energy drinks and young children should avoid all caffeinated drinks. People with heart disease should also avoid consuming high quantities of energy drinks.

References

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