



# ARE ENERGY DRINKS HARMFUL

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**Think that caffeinated energy drink is a healthy afternoon pick-me-up? Some experts disagree and are urging the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to require companies to put health warning labels on their energy-boosting drinks. Apparently, the beverages' high caffeine content may pose a serious consumer health risk, especially for kids and young adults. Read on to learn more.**

**More caffeine per serving than coffee**

A review paper in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* indicates that a single serving of an energy drink can contain upwards of 500 milligrams of caffeine – an amount equivalent to 14 cans of cola.

The experts, from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, are concerned because most energy drinks don't list caffeine levels on their labels. Some energy drinks may have 50 milligrams while others have 10 times that amount. Just think about the people, particularly kids, who drink more than one in a day.

High doses of caffeine can lead to caffeine intoxication, which is characterized by heart racing, palpitations, nervousness, anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, gastrointestinal distress, tremors, hyperactivity, psychomotor agitation (restlessness and pacing) and, in rare cases, even death.

## **High-caffeine energy drinks may be a gateway to drug abuse**

How about those Red Bull Vodkas? A 2007 survey indicated that 27 percent of the college students surveyed reported making energy drink cocktails with alcohol at least once in the last month.

Researchers say that the danger in mixing energy drinks and alcohol is that you are less likely to perceive your level of intoxication, putting you at a greater risk of alcohol-related injury.

In addition, experts are concerned that the strong stimulant effect provided by energy drinks may increase the risk of abusing prescription stimulants such as amphetamines and methylphenidate. A 2008 study showed energy drink consumption significantly predicted subsequent nonmedical prescription stimulant use.

### **Energy drinks sales are booming**

Despite the negative side effects of over-consuming caffeine, energy drink sales continue to climb, with an estimated \$5.4 billion in sales in the US alone.

Scientists at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine are concerned about the aggressive marketing of energy drinks to adolescents and young adults. Young people tend to be naïve when it comes to the negative impact of excess caffeine consumption – most people are not even aware that caffeine intoxication is possible.

## Energy drinks are considered supplements

Unfortunately, it doesn't look like the FDA will be requiring health warning labels any time soon. According to an article in *Medscape Medical News*, the FDA considers energy drinks to be supplements and companies are not required by law to seek premarket approval.

So, the responsibility rests on you. Be aware of your energy drink consumption and don't rely on caffeinated beverages to keep you going. Opt for adequate sleep, regular healthy meals and snacks, and stay hydrated. And if you have kids, keep their energy drink consumption in check – you don't want them to end up with caffeine intoxication or the young beginning of a caffeine addiction.

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