



ENERGY DRINKS: WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

The popularity of energy drinks over the last decade has increased worldwide, especially among adolescents. Energy drinks such as Red Bull™, Monster™, and Rockstar™ are said to enhance performance, provide energy, quench thirst, increase alertness, and improve the taste of alcoholic beverages. Energy drinks also tend to be high in added sugar, which can contribute to dental caries and weight gain. In 2011, Health Canada changed the classification of energy drinks from a natural health product to a food. This means that Health Canada has placed additional safety requirements on these products, specifically in regards to the ingredients and labeling (Health Canada, 2012). For example, the packaging must include a “high caffeine content” warning label. This enhanced labeling requirement is important as it gives us the information we need to know regarding what ingredients the drink contains, and in what amounts, so we can decide if this is something we want to consume.

High Caffeine Content

Many people consume some source of caffeine every day. Common sources of caffeine include coffee, tea, pop, and chocolate. Although each of these products pose health risks if used in excess, all of them can be consumed in moderate amounts without exceeding recommended maximum levels of caffeine intake, which is no more than 400-450 mg daily for adults, no more than 300 mg for women of childbearing age, and no more than 2.5 mg/kg for adolescents (Health Canada, 2012). This is important to know as the caffeine content in one energy drink can be as high as 180 mg/serving (Canadian Beverage Association, 2013). Consuming too much caffeine can be harmful to your health, leading to side effects such as insomnia, nausea, restlessness, tremors, and depression (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2013).

Children under the age of 12 have lower maximum daily intakes for caffeine.

Therefore, they should avoid consuming energy drinks altogether because of the high caffeine levels they contain. Children are more likely to experience the negative side effects of caffeine.



Sleeping Habits

Energy drinks are often associated with poor quality of sleep. Studies show that energy drink users experience shorter sleep duration, more disrupted sleep, and more complaints of daytime sleepiness compared to non-users (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Sleep deprivation can lead to a variety of issues including impaired memory, mood swings, lack of concentration, and poor performance at work or at school. The use of caffeine to mask sleep deprivation can create an unhealthy sleep-wake cycle. For example, you might reach for an energy drink during the day because you have a hard time staying awake. However, the caffeine you drink keeps you from sleeping at night which makes you feel even more tired the next day. In general, try to limit your caffeine intake throughout the day, especially in the six hours before bedtime (Drake, Roehrs, Shanbroom, & Roth, 2013).

Energy Drinks and Alcohol

The mix of energy drinks and alcohol has gained popularity among young adults but is dangerous for many reasons (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Indeed, research has found that people drink more and achieve a higher blood alcohol concentration (BAC) when they combine alcohol and caffeine. The added alertness that a caffeinated energy drink provides may cause individuals to feel that they are able to drink more alcohol at one time; putting them at increased risk for alcohol-related harm. Combining energy drinks and alcohol is a dangerous practice and should never be attempted on any occasion.

High Sugar Content

Most people know that eating too many cookies or too much candy is not good for your health because of the high sugar content, but the added sugar in energy drinks is often overlooked. Consuming too much added sugar is associated with weight gain, increased risk of chronic diseases, and dental caries. For an average person on a 2,000 calorie per day diet, the World Health Organization recommends a maximum of 50 grams (12.5 teaspoons) of sugar per day (World Health Organization, 2015). The average sugar content in one energy drink is typically around 15 teaspoons or 60 grams (Harvard School of Public Health, 2009). This is more than your whole day's recommended intake.



Having one energy drink occasionally may not drastically affect your health, however frequent consumption, especially more than one per day, can cause negative health effects. There are many ways to feel energized throughout the day without needing an energy drink. For example, ensuring you are getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of water, and being physically active. The bottom line is that children should never consume “Energy Drinks” and adults should think twice before they choose an “Energy Drink” over a healthier beverage option.

Key Reference

1. Canadian Beverage Association. Energy drinks. (2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.canadianbeverage.ca/beverages/energy-drinks/>.