

The Lowdown on Energy Drinks

By Editorial Staff

Many energy drinks claim to increase energy and vitality. In making this claim, the manufacturers often load their concoctions with a variety of substances, including but certainly not limited to caffeine, herbs and various amino acids. That brings us to an interesting question: Do these drinks actually have health benefits, or are there hidden health dangers? Here's the lowdown on energy drinks.

Energy drinks constitute big business these days. While Austrian-based Red Bull claims to own the lion's share of the market, all signs point to that dominance changing in the near future. Monster, Adrenaline Rush, Venom and 5-Hour Energy are just a few of the estimated thousands of energy drink distributors worldwide, and they're everywhere: in stores, schools, gyms and all manner of social environments.

Suffice it to say the popularity of these drinks is unquestionable; their health benefits is another story altogether. The big concern with the majority of energy drinks is their caffeine content: up to 80 mg of caffeine. According to Brown University, that's more than twice the caffeine in a can of Mountain Dew and more than *three* times the caffeine in a can of Coca Cola Classic. Why is this important? Because too much caffeine can elevate the heart rate, increase blood pressure, and lead to insomnia (Some energy drink manufacturers have now come out with decaffeinated versions, although that hasn't seemed to particularly impact the popularity of the caffeinated varieties.)



A recent study that investigated potential safety issues in energy drinks

reveal that most energy drinks also contain some combination of natural products such as guarana, taurine and ginseng. Oh, and let's not forget about sugar, one of the major ingredients in addition to caffeine. Average sugar content can exceed 35 grams per can, according to the study, published in the *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association*. (Sugar-free versions of some energy drinks are now available, but remember, there are plenty of sugar-free sodas out there, and none of them are any good for you, either.)

Here's perhaps the most telling point emphasized in the study: "The amounts of guarana, taurine, and ginseng found in popular energy drinks are far below the amounts expected to deliver either therapeutic benefits or adverse events. However, caffeine and sugar are present in amounts known to cause a variety of adverse health effects."

Here are other things to keep in mind if you or someone you know consumes energy drinks, again courtesy of Brown University:

- Energy drinks should not be consumed while exercising; they tend to promote dehydration, which can be dangerous when combined with fluid loss from sweating.
- Energy drinks should not be combined with alcohol (they often are); the former is a stimulant and the latter is a depressant, which can be a bad combination. Users may not be aware of how impaired they are because the stimulant effects mask the effects of the alcohol. And again, both tend to promote dehydration.

The bottom line: Energy drinks probably aren't doing you much good, and they could actually end up doing you some harm. Talk to your doctor for more information.



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