

Energy Drinks... What's the Buzz?

What are energy drinks?

Energy drinks are beverages that claim to give an extra boost of energy from caffeine and herbal supplements. They are popular with youth and young adults looking for extra energy to cram for an exam, play sports or party.

What's in energy drinks?

Energy drinks contain:

- large amounts of caffeine
- herbal supplements
- combinations of other substances like taurine (an amino acid) and glucuronolactone (a carbohydrate)
- sugar

The long-term effects of ingredient combinations have not been tested for safety. As a result, energy drinks are banned in countries like Norway, Denmark and France.

Energy drinks are high in sugar, containing amounts close to those in soft drinks. That is about 10 teaspoons of sugar in a 355 mL can.

Energy drinks are also high in caffeine. Often the amount of caffeine in a can is not listed because it's found in the herbal supplements added to the drink.

Some energy drinks contain over 250 mg of caffeine. That is more than six times the amount in a can of cola. This is a concern because many young people are drinking energy drinks frequently.

What's the concern about caffeine?

Each person's reaction to caffeine is different. Caffeine can lead to difficulty sleeping, headaches, irritability and nervousness.

For children 10-12 years old, no more than 85 mg of caffeine, which equals about two cans of cola, per day is recommended by Health Canada. One can of an energy drink often contains much more caffeine than the entire recommended daily total.

For youth and adults, no more than 400 mg of caffeine per day is recommended. That equals about three cups (237 mL each) of brewed coffee.

Did you know that energy drinks are not considered a food by Health Canada? Instead, they are regulated as natural health products because of the added caffeine. Labels on energy drinks warn that they are not recommended for:

- children
- pregnant or breastfeeding women
- caffeine-sensitive people





Labels also indicate energy drinks should not be mixed with alcohol and people should limit their intake to a certain number of cans per day. Check the label of energy drinks for this information. If it doesn't list the amount of caffeine added, look for "guarana extract," an herbal supplement with caffeine.

Sports drinks vs. energy drinks

Energy drinks are sometimes confused with sports drinks. However, sports drinks and energy drinks are designed for different purposes and contain different ingredients. Energy drinks can actually harm athletic performance.

If you are active for less than an hour or doing less intense activity, drink water. Water is the best thirst quencher.

	Purpose	Ingredients	Effects
Sports drinks	Designed to rehydrate the body after non-stop intense exercise for one hour or more	Glucose, electrolytes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replaces lost energy and nutrients • Prevents dehydration
Energy drinks	Provide a quick spurt of energy	Caffeine, sugar, herbal supplements, other substances (e.g., taurine, glucuronolactone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily increases your heart rate, breathing and blood pressure • Not designed to hydrate the body, so you may become dehydrated

Energy drinks and alcohol

Mixing energy drinks with alcohol has become popular at bars, clubs and parties. This is a dangerous combination. Caffeine is a stimulant and masks the effects of alcohol. This can lead people to underestimate how drunk they are. Effects may include:

- A false sense of being alert. This could lead you to do things you usually wouldn't do, like drive after drinking.
- Not being aware of lost coordination and balance. You may slip, trip or fall when dancing.
- Drinking too much or too quickly and "passing out" from alcohol poisoning. Alcohol poisoning is serious and can kill you.

Energy drinks and alcohol both have effects on the body. Taken together, the results can be dangerous. If you drink alcohol, it is safer not to use energy drinks at the same time.

Take the buzz from energy drinks with caution. If you drink them, follow the warnings on the label.

For more information

Health Canada: Safe Use of Energy Drinks – www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/prod/energy-energie_e.html

Health Canada: It's Your Health – Caffeine – www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/caffeine_e.html

Health Canada: Caffeine and Your Health – www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/facts-faits/caffeine_e.html