

# Energy Drinks

## Do They Really Equal More Energy?

The sunny days of summer have passed and winter blah begins. This time of year many find it a challenge to make it out of the door for a daily run. Lunchroom conversation often turns to a report about a lack of energy and motivation to keep up with the daily routine. In an effort to manage the necessities of life or to look for an extra boost, many resort to popular energy drinks such as Red Bull, Rockstar, and Monster.

Do energy drinks provide more energy? To answer this question it is important to evaluate the ingredients in an energy drink. Most consist of high doses of caffeine and other stimulants such as ginseng, ginko, guarana, and taurine. They also contain added minerals and vitamins such as B Vitamins. Lastly, they often contain high doses of sugar.

In breaking down the ingredients let us first look at caffeine. Although the amount of caffeine is not indicated on many energy drink labels, the average energy drink contains about the same amount of caffeine as three cans of cola. The added caffeine can, of course, provide a greater sense of alertness. However, caffeine highs are often followed by lows. This may lead to an erratic sense of energy over the course of the day.

Some may respond to the high dose of caffeine feeling a sense of nervousness, anxiety, increased heart rate and blood pressure, bowel irritability, as well as having irregular sleep patterns. It is also important to keep in mind that caffeine is addictive. If daily consumption of an energy drink is eliminated or reduced, one is likely to suffer withdrawal symptoms. Lastly, the caffeine content has the potential to be dehydrating.

The purpose of the herbal stimulants in energy drinks is to enhance the effect of caffeine. Unfortunately the combination of stimulants with caffeine has not been studied enough to define it as safe. Although each ingredient individually may appear to have potential health advantages, it has been questioned if the ingredient combination contributes health risks for those with seizure activity and heart related conditions. This may be disconcerting since we can be unaware of underlying medical condition. At this point there is no evidence to support short or long term benefits of the added stimulants.

The drinks are often fortified with vitamins and minerals giving the appearance of added health benefits. There is no major disadvantage to safe levels of fortification. However, the recommended intake of the added nutrients can be met by simply consuming a healthy diet.

The high sugar content cannot be overlooked. A high dose of sugar commonly provides the body with a boost of energy. Some claim that the sugar content of such energy drinks is contributing to the obesity epidemic - particularly among youth since that is where marketing is targeted. Energy in the form of sugar is often short lived and not worth the calories.

The attraction to energy drinks as a fun alternative to a bottle of water is understandable. If you choose to drink such beverages be sure to read and compare labels carefully. It is wise to pay particular attention to the content of caffeine, herbal stimulants, and sugar as well as the number of servings per container.

There are a few energy drinks on the market that may have a place in a healthy diet. For example, Airforce Nutrisoda provides all natural energy type beverages. Most of the beverages contain no sugar, caffeine, sodium, or aspartame. They are fortified with vitamins and minerals that are all at safe levels and cans are clearly labeled with the exact content in each soda.

In the debate over whether to choose an energy drink, the cons of the beverages often outweigh the pros. A natural, healthy diet and lifestyle can provide much more sustained energy than a drink loaded with caffeine and sugar. Remember, an energy drink should never be confused or supplemented for sports beverages such as Gatorade during exercise. A balanced, healthy diet with a regimen of adequate sleep is truly the best and safest approach in providing yourself with sufficient daily energy.

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