

THE HEALTH RISKS OF ENERGY DRINKS

While energy drinks can give you a lift, recent research has found that they have a dark side.

Toxic reactions and serious hospitalisation have increased significantly among young people who use energy drinks.

These drinks are highly caffeinated, sugary beverages with a few additives to make them *sound* healthful—think taurine, ginseng, vitamins and amino acids. Yet common brands contain three to four times the level of caffeine found in a can of cola! When you consider that the average number of energy drinks consumed at any one time is five (which translates to drinking 7.5 to 10 cups of coffee or 15 cola drinks in a relatively short period of time), you can see why it's easy to overdose with these beverages!

Energy drinks are heavily marketed to adolescents, young adults and professionals, and they've become a popular pick-me-up during the day as well as a party aid. Alarming, they are often consumed with other caffeinated drinks, caffeine tablets, alcohol and even ecstasy, making their impact all the more dangerous.

health problems

If your body tends to break down caffeine slowly (and there's a gene test that can determine this), even a small amount of an energy drink can cause problems. Common symptoms reported to poison centres from the regular or high use of these drinks include heart palpitations, tremors, agitation, gastrointestinal upset and chest pain. There are also reports of caffeine-related deaths in young people allegedly caused by energy drinks.

energy-boosting alternatives

If you regularly feel sapped of energy, you should listen to your body and take more rest breaks, catch up on sleep and re-examine your diet. Energy drinks are a risky, short-term fix that can be damaging to your heart.

Smarter beverages to refresh young and old alike include mineral water with a splash of juice, plain chilled water with lemon, freshly squeezed juices or smoothies.



Nutritionist Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and co-author of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve well-being. See www.sueradd.com for more nutrition information.