

Teens and Energy Drinks: a Potentially Dangerous Combination

ENERGY DRINKS ARE ONE of the fastest growing beverage products on the global market. The worldwide market is projected to increase to \$84.8 billion by 2025, according to a report from the business consulting firm Grand View Research. It found that teens alone consumed \$16.3 billion worth of energy drinks in 2016, and adolescent consumption is only expected to rise. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, alongside multivitamins, energy drinks are the most sought after dietary supplement consumed by teens and young adults, with males between 18 and 34 drinking the most energy drinks and about one-third of kids ages 12 to 17 consuming them regularly.

These drinks offer the promise of boosting mental and physical energy along with increased performance, making them highly appealing to young people. The main ingredient in these drinks is caffeine. Known for increasing mental alertness, this stimulant is the most widely consumed drug in the U.S. Found in products like chocolate, coffee, teas and many sodas, caffeine is often thought of as a harmless drug. And that may be true if it's consumed in moderation, but these energy drinks contain between 70 to 200 milligrams of caffeine per serving!

Scientists agree that it's OK for a healthy adult to have up to about 400 mg of caffeine per day (equivalent to four cups of coffee), but a teen, on the other hand, is an entirely different story. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, kids between the ages of 12 and 18 should not consume more than 100 mg (a cup of coffee, a couple of cups of tea or about two sodas) per day. Additionally, the Academy recommends that kids steer clear of energy drinks altogether. Unfortunately, our young people aren't heeding that advice. Adolescents are reportedly the fastest-growing population of caffeine users in America. Research indicates 83 percent of teens drink caffeinated beverages regularly, and nearly 96 percent consume them occasionally.

Caffeine isn't the only substance in energy drinks that give consumers a jolt. If you read the label, you'll also find B vitamins, guarana, ginseng, green tea extracts and taurine, all known energy inducers. Due to the natural bitterness of caffeine, lots of sugar is often added to these drinks to make them taste syrupy sweet. So along with a surge of energy, kids can get a sugar high, which ironically can lead to a sugar crash. As more and more people are watching caloric intake, sugar-free versions of these energy drinks are becoming more popular, including with teens. Many kids report drinking them as a supplemental weight loss product. With all that's in energy drinks, research published last year in the Journal of the American Heart Association warns that there is little known about the safety of some of the ingredients. Now that's something to be concerned about.

With so many of these drinks flooding the market, teens have many to choose from and they don't have to go far to find them. Just one visit to the supermarket, or convenience or health food store is all it takes to purchase one.

The companies producing energy drinks do a fantastic job of marketing their beverages to young people. It doesn't take long to spot logos such as Red Bull or Monster at football games, Formula One races or snowboarding competitions, and at other popular sporting events. Energy drink companies even have sports personalities backing up their products, giving them the facade of being a "healthy" beverage that makes you perform better. Unfortunately, teens are drinking up that message. Adolescents report that they perceive energy drinks as a healthy alternative to soda. It can't be that bad if it contains vitamins right? Of course, the truth is that these drinks can be extremely dangerous to teens.

Dangers Associated With Energy Drinks

In a study from Chapman University, 40 percent of teens reported an adverse effect while consuming energy drinks. These included:

- Abdominal pain
- Breathing difficulties
- Chest pains
- Gastrointestinal problems such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Heightened anxiety
- Insomnia
- Feeling jittery or experiencing tremors
- Seizures

Researchers also discovered that about 15 percent of teens mixed their energy drinks with alcohol and about 9 percent consumed energy drinks in conjunction with other drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine. Drinking energy drinks alone has some serious side effects, but adding drugs and alcohol to the mix can be a dangerous and potentially deadly combination.

Did you know that one energy drink can pose a danger to a young person, according to a Mayo Clinic study? These drinks not only cause blood pressure to rise but they also increase the release of stress hormones into the system, raising the risk of heart damage. Also, all that caffeine can start messing with a teen's sleep-wake cycles, and according to research, teens are already sleep-deprived, getting on average only about seven hours of rest on a school night and needing around nine.

Without any age restrictions to limit sales of energy drinks to youth, any child or teen can purchase these products without parental knowledge. There is one state pushing to make a change though: South Carolina. This state is looking at requiring those purchasing energy drinks to be at least 18 years. If a proposed bill passes, South Carolina would be the first state in the nation to take a stance against selling energy drinks to

minors – and maybe that would spur other states to do the same thing. Over time energy drinks can lead to dependence and withdrawal symptoms; after all, they do contain high concentrations of the drug caffeine.

To join the efforts to increase public awareness, the American College of Sports Medicine earlier this year put forth several recommendations for the sale and consumption of energy drinks. The ACSM advised:

- Energy drinks should not be marketed to kids and adolescents.
- These products not be consumed before, during or after vigorous exercise, since doing so has been linked to deaths.
- We should do more to educate youth about energy drink consumption. It was suggested formal education about energy drinks be a part of school nutrition and covered in health and wellness classes.

*****Answer the questions in complete sentences.**

1. What do energy drinks promise?
2. The main ingredient in an energy drink is...
3. Explain what the Academy of Pediatrics states for teenagers.
4. List one danger associated with energy drinks.
5. Explain how the marketing of energy drinks misleads teenagers.
6. What combination creates a life-threatening mixture?
7. Give one example of how marketers connect energy drinks to athletes.

Write a paragraph that explains how the relationship between energy drinks and teenagers should change.