

Q. Do the new “energy drinks” cause any health problems?

A. “Energy drinks” are popular with teens and young adults. The energy they promise comes primarily from two sources: sugar and caffeine. The sugar gives a short-term lift to your blood sugar levels if you’re hungry. But if you don’t eat real food along with the energy drink, your blood sugar level will drop quickly – and to a level lower than it would be if you hadn’t consumed anything at all.

Caffeine is a common ingredient in other drinks as well, including coffee, soft drinks, lattes, and tea. But most energy drinks contain very high amounts of caffeine, about 3-5 times more than that in a cola soft drink. Some energy drinks contain even more.

The problem with energy drinks is that they are consumed in large quantities by teens and young adults, which can cause a caffeine addiction and lead to more being consumed. A recent study on energy drinks showed that two drinks a day raised blood pressure levels significantly each day.¹

Another large population study of nearly 25,000 people found that people who regularly drank caffeinated beverages had a 36% increased risk of developing high blood pressure during the 13-year study compared to those who drank little or no caffeine.² Thus, caffeinated energy drinks can contribute



to future health problems, including an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and other damage from high blood pressure.

So how does caffeine cause so much trouble? It gives a person a boost by raising the epinephrine (or adrenaline) level in the blood. This hormone, in turn, raises blood sugar and blood pressure levels, and stimulates the central nervous system. The high amount of caffeine in an energy drink nearly doubles a person’s normal adrenaline level, and keeps it elevated for up to 2 hours. A high caffeine intake also tends to increase tension and anxiety and decrease relaxation and the ability to sleep well.

Perhaps a greater problem is what the energy drink does to a person’s nutritional status. When you’re hungry, the natural way for you to increase your energy is by eating nutritious foods – not by consuming a stimulant and sugar. The “energy” boost from an energy drink is short-lived and results in an even greater crash in energy when it wears off.

Adequate sleep (at least 7-8 hours daily), healthy meals, and regular exercise are the best ways to develop high-energy minds and bodies. Energy drinks, stimulants, and sugar are cheap substitutes that promise much. But consuming them is not a healthy way to sustain long-term energy and good health.

References:

1. Steinke L, et al. Effect of “Energy Drink” Consumption on Hemodynamic and Electrocardiographic Parameters in Healthy Young Adults. *Annals of Pharmacotherapy*. 2009 Apr;43:596-602.
2. Hu G, et al. Coffee consumption and the incidence of antihypertensive drug treatment in Finnish men and women. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2007 Aug;86:457-464.

