

What's the big deal with extra energy?

These days it is so easy to stop in at a gas station and pick up an energy drink if we're feeling a little sluggish or just need that extra boost to get through the day. The colorful labels and catchy phrases on the bottle make it that more enticing for young people. But do we really know what is in these addicting energy surges? Or the effects it has on our bodies?

According to an article by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the FDA is not required to label or limit how much caffeine is in an energy drink because unlike soft drinks which are categorized as food they are considered dietary supplements. The article goes on to say that a 16 oz energy drink contains as much as 70-80mg per 8 oz serving which is equivalent to 3 times the concentration in a cola drink! Furthermore, other ingredients listed such as guarana "can contain 40-80 mg of caffeine" which is not listed under the caffeine amount. So who knows how much caffeine you are really consuming in just one drink!

So what kind of effects can all this caffeine have on our bodies? Well according to the article consuming just 4-12 mg/ kg of caffeine can cause symptoms such as anxiety and jitteriness. With one energy drink that contains at the minimum 70 mg per 8 oz serving, one can only imagine the effects it produces. It goes on to include even more dangerous effects the drinks have on children such as "palpitations, seizures, strokes, and even sudden death." These drinks have also been associated with causing serious adverse effects especially in children with compromised health such as diabetes, seizures, cardiac abnormalities, or behavior disorders.

Another question to ask is why do these kids need an energy boost at such a young age? According to the article "Of the 5449 US caffeine overdoses reported in 2007, 46% occurred in those younger than 19 years old." These days kids are involved in not just one or two sports or clubs but several, combine that with the amount of homework required to complete each night, it's no wonder why energy drinks make completing these tasks much more doable.

What can we do then, in order to prevent kids from choosing this as a first choice? Education! By educating and spreading the word to children and young adults of the effects these addicting and lethal drinks have, prevention of heart problems, seizures, and even deaths may be attained. So next time you feel tired or need something to get you through the day, stop and grab a healthy alternative, like an apple!

Seifer, S.M., Schaechter, J.L., Hershorin, E.R., & Lipshultz, S.E. (2011). Health effects of energy drinks on children, adolescents, and young adults. *American Academy of Pediatrics*. 127(3).