

Energy Drinks: What you need to know



What are Energy Drinks?

Energy drinks are a new product available in Canada. They are often found in small (250 mL) cans and claim to “energize” you and make you more alert. Some examples include:

- Red Bull Energy Drink®
- SoBe Adrenaline Rush®
- SoBe No Fear®
- Hype Energy Drink®
- Red Dragon Energy Drink®
- YJ Stinger®

Are They Safe To Drink?

Unlike most food and beverages, energy drinks are regulated as supplements. Health Canada cautions that children and pregnant or breastfeeding women should avoid energy drinks. Health Canada also cautions that energy drinks should NOT be mixed with alcohol and no more than 500 mL be consumed in one day.

Not all energy drinks that are sold have been evaluated by Health Canada yet. If the energy drink has a NPN (Natural Health Product Number) on the can, it has been evaluated, however this “evaluation” does not guarantee that a particular energy drink is a healthy choice. Check the label.

If you have had a bad reaction to an energy drink you should let Health Canada know at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

What is in Energy Drinks and Why?

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant and can be found on energy drink labels listed as Guarana, yerba mate, or caffeine. Most drinks have 80 mg or more per 250 mL can, which is double that of soft drinks but half that of brewed coffee.

This amount of caffeine is probably not harmful for adults, but exceeds recommendations for children. Health Canada suggests no more than 45 mg/day for children 4-6 years, 62.5 mg/d for 7-9 years and 85 mg/day for children 10-12 years.

Herbs

Many energy drinks contain the herbs *Gingko biloba* and *ginseng*. These herbs do not improve performance and are added to most energy drinks in very low amounts. They can interact with drugs like warfarin and affect blood clotting, however, so be sure to talk to your doctor.

Taurine

Taurine is an amino acid and found in the diet in meat and dairy products. Some energy drinks claim that taurine makes you more alert but there is no research to show this. Most energy drinks have 1 gram of taurine per 250 mL can. The safety of such large doses is not known.

Carbohydrate

Most energy drinks contain twice as much sugar (carbohydrate) as a sports drink. Excessive amounts of sugar consumed during exercise can lead to nausea stomach cramps, and diarrhea in some people. Be sure to practice what and how much you drink during training before competing so that you know what your system can tolerate.

Should I Use Energy Drinks During Exercise?

The best choices during exercise are water or a sports drink. The high sugar content and carbonation of energy drinks can interfere with hydration which makes them a poor choice for use during exercise. Proper hydration is the main concern during exercise, especially in the heat. Furthermore, caffeinated beverages are not recommended for young athletes before, during or after exercise.

Heather Petrie, M. Sc, P.Dt., is a lecturer in the School of Nutrition and Dietetics at Acadia University in Nova Scotia and is an advisory board member of the Gatorade Sports Science Institute Canada.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE GATORADE SPORTS SCIENCE INSTITUTE (GSSI) LOG ON TO:
www.gssiweb.org or e-mail GssiCanada@QTGCanada.com.**