



What is the difference between energy drinks and sports drinks?

- Energy drinks are drinks that contain stimulants, including caffeine. Examples are Red Bull, Monster, Rockstar, Dutch Bros Rebel, Celsius, 5-Hour Energy, etc.
- Sports drinks are drinks that help replace fluids and electrolytes, for example in athletes, patients with dysautonomia/POTS, or during illness. Examples are Gatorade, Powerade, Pedialyte, BodyArmor, Liquid IV, etc.

What are some common ingredients in energy drinks?

- Caffeine – usually 100-300 mg per serving. For comparison, a serving of a caffeinated soft drink or tea contains 30-50 mg of caffeine, and a cup of coffee contains 80-100 mg.
- Taurine – an amino acid that is naturally present in fish and meat. The amounts of taurine found in energy drinks are not expected to provide beneficial or adverse effects.
- Guarana – a plant that contains caffeine and other stimulants (theophylline, theobromine).
- Ginseng – an herb that does not contain caffeine, but does contain another type of stimulant called a ginsenoside.

When additives like guarana or ginseng are present, the total amount of stimulant in the energy drink is greater than the listed amount of caffeine.

What about the sugar content of energy drinks?

Energy drinks contain large amounts of sugar, but this can vary widely. A 12 ounce can of Red Bull contains 37 grams of sugar, compared to 39 grams in a 12 ounce can of Coca-Cola. For comparison, 1 teaspoon of sugar is equivalent to 4 grams of sugar.

What are typical effects of stimulants?

Stimulants make a person feel more awake and alert. Stimulants can also have detrimental effects, such as anxiety, shakiness, trouble sleeping, headaches, palpitations, chest pain, abdominal cramping, diarrhea, sweating, and flushing.

Is it OK for my child to have an energy drink?

Energy drink consumption is not recommended for children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under age 12 should not consume caffeinated products at all, and the maximum recommended daily caffeine intake for children 12-18 years old is 100 mg. This means that the majority of energy drinks, especially those containing additives like guarana, are not considered safe for children. The National Federation of State High School Associations also recommends against the use of energy drinks in young athletes.

Is it true that energy drinks can be dangerous?

Yes. In addition to the common side effects of stimulants and the high sugar intake, energy drinks have been linked to heart rhythm abnormalities and deaths in people with and without underlying heart disease. Unfortunately, despite warnings from the AAP and CDC, up to 50% of adolescents report consuming energy drinks, and some high schools even sell energy drinks in their vending machines. Parents can help by educating their children on the adverse effects of energy drinks, and by promoting good sleep, less screen time, and healthy nutrition as the best ways to boost energy.