

## **Energy Drinks: A Healthy and Safe Way to Stay Alert and Awake?**

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With promising names like Monster, Rockstar, and NOS, it's no wonder that energy drinks have become an increasingly popular way to try to improve alertness, enhance performance, and fight off sleep. As more and more people reach for these high caffeine drinks, the health industry has begun to question how safe and effective are energy drinks on a regular basis.

Unlike the rest of our food and drinks, energy drinks are not monitored by an agency to make sure that they are safe to drink. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies energy drinks as dietary supplements. They don't have to follow the same rules that other drinks do, such as acceptable ingredients and labeling. For example, sodas and other caffeine beverages can't have more than 71 mg of caffeine for every 12 fl oz. Energy drinks can have an unlimited amount of caffeine without having to label the amount or place a warning label if it contains a very high amount of caffeine. Some energy drinks contain more than 3 times the caffeine the FDA allows in soda; one energy drink, on the market, contains more than 500 mg.

Most people don't know how much caffeine they consume every day and even more don't know how much is considered to be safe. It is difficult to determine safe amounts because each person can tolerate a different amount, based on their weight and usual consumption of caffeine. In addition, people who don't regularly consume caffeine or who consume small amounts are more sensitive to caffeine's affects.

High levels of caffeine, as much as 300 mg, can cause "caffeine intoxication." The British Journal of Addiction estimates that 1 in every 10 people have had caffeine intoxication. Symptoms include nervousness, restlessness, tremors, rapid heartbeat (tachycardia) irritability, depression, "caffeine induced sleep disorder", disorientation, hallucinations, and in some cases death. High levels of caffeine can also increase the risk of heart failure because it makes the heart pump faster and increases blood pressure.

Unfortunately as people rely more and more on caffeine drinks to give them additional energy, they become resistant to caffeine and have to consume greater amounts to get the benefits. Building tolerance to energy drinks is especially dangerous because they already have very high amounts of caffeine. Energy drinks have been linked to seizures, strokes, and even deaths. Athletes are not immune to the dangers of high caffeine energy drinks. For example, a motocross athlete's heart stopped during an event after drinking 8 cans of Red Bull in 5 hours.

Reducing the amount of caffeine you drink, lowers your body's tolerance and allows you to get more of the benefits from a smaller amount. However, the best way to increase energy and to stay awake is to ensure that you get enough sleep at night. If you do decide to use caffeine for an energy boost, only consume small amounts, such as a cup of coffee or cans of soda (40-100 mg). Try to limit your "boosts" to no more than 1-2 times a week.