

CONNECTICUT Clearinghouse

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Caffeine and Energy Boosting Drugs: Energy Drinks

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

What are energy drinks?

Energy drinks are beverages like Red Bull, Venom, Adrenaline Rush, 180, ISO Sprint, and Whoopass, which contain large doses of caffeine and other legal stimulants like ephedrine, guarana, and ginseng. Energy drinks may contain as much as 80 mg. of caffeine, the equivalent of a cup of coffee. Compared to the 37 mg. of caffeine in a Mountain Dew, or the 23 mg. in a Coca-Cola Classic, that's a big punch. These drinks are marketed to people under 30, especially to college students, and are widely available both on and off campus.



Are there short-term dangers to drinking energy drinks?

Individual responses to caffeine vary, and these drinks should be treated carefully because of how powerful they are. Energy drinks' stimulating properties can boost the heart rate and blood pressure (sometimes to the point of palpitations), dehydrate the body, and, like other stimulants, prevent sleep.

Energy drinks should not be used while exercising as the combination of fluid loss from sweating and the diuretic quality of the caffeine can leave the user severely dehydrated.

Know what you're drinking. Energy drinks are not necessarily bad for you, but they shouldn't be seen as "natural alternatives" either. Some of the claims they make like "improved performance and concentration" can be misleading. If you think of them as highly-caffeinated drinks, you'll have a more accurate picture of what they are and how they affect

you. You wouldn't use Mountain Dew as a sports drink. And a drink like Red Bull and vodka is more like strong coffee and whisky than anything else.

What happens when energy drinks are combined with alcohol?

Energy drinks are also used as mixers with alcohol. This combination carries a number of dangers:

- Since energy drinks are stimulants and alcohol is a depressant, the combination of effects may be dangerous. The stimulant effects can mask how intoxicated you are and prevent you from realizing how much alcohol you have consumed. Fatigue is one of the ways the body normally tells someone that they've had enough to drink.
- The stimulant effect can give the person the impression they aren't impaired. No matter how alert you feel, your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is the same as it would be without the energy drink. Once the stimulant effect wears off, the depressant effects of the alcohol will remain and could cause vomiting in your sleep or respiratory depression.
- Both energy drinks and alcohol are very dehydrating (the caffeine in energy drinks is a diuretic). Dehydration can hinder your body's ability to metabolize alcohol and will increase the toxicity, and therefore the hangover, the next day.

Brown University Health Education
www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/atod/energydrinks.htm