

## ENERGY DRINKS

It's hard not to walk into any convenience store located near a high school or middle school after the final bell has rung and not find teenagers purchasing Red Bull, Monster Energy and 5-hour Energy drinks. While the target demographic for these products is 18-34 year olds (males in particular), the National Institute of Health found that one-third of 12-17 year olds drink them regularly. It's also not hard to see how the marketing of this \$55 billion global industry is directed to young people. If you watched X-Games this winter, you couldn't help but notice the advertising. Action sports from NASCAR to professional bull riding are sponsored by energy-drink companies. It's easy to see the marketing towards males when the Monster Energy girls parade around the various winners. Adding to the youth appeal is the endless supply of sweet berry and citrus flavors.

So what's the driving force behind energy drinks? Start by looking at caffeine, the most widely used psycho-active substance on earth. The neuro-transmitter dopamine is a big driver for the brain's alertness and attention systems. The average cup of morning coffee has 95 mg of caffeine and increases available Dopamine by 400%. The consumer feels more stimulated and ready to face the day. Energy drinks take advantage of this brain system by adding extra caffeine into their products. Red Bull has 80 mg per 8.4 oz, Monster adds 160 mg per 16 oz can, and 5-hour Energy packs in 200 mg per 1.93 oz. In addition to caffeine, many of the products add in sugar, glucose, taurine and ginseng for energy enhancement.

When the caffeine and energy enhancers wear off and Dopamine levels drop back down, the drinker feels a "crash" effect with symptoms that include fatigue, anxiety, headaches and moodiness. These side effects get worse related to the amount and duration of caffeine consumed. In order to avoid side effects and problems with caffeine, the Mayo Clinic recommends the average adult limit daily consumption to 400 mg a day.

While these are considered safe standards for adults, there are no so-called safe standards for children. While a bit of a coffee drink or a soda now and then isn't going to dramatically affect a teen's development, joining the energy drink craze will. Studies have found that regular teen use of EDs is correlated with an increase in sensation seeking/risk-taking behavior, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, stress and sleep disruption. Those side effects don't include caffeine overdosing. This past fall, a 16-year-old boy in Chicago died after consuming an ED, a soda and a latte in a short period of time. His heart couldn't handle it. The American Academy of Pediatrics echoes this abstinence stance: "Stimulant-containing energy drinks have no place in the diets of children or adolescents."

What should parents do? Start with educating your child about how these products impact their health. Set a standard at home and make sure your teen knows that this standard applies both at home and when he or she is out with friends. Be aware of the research regarding the effects of caffeine and the other ingredients added into these drinks and the impact on younger brains. You can also get behind efforts to have warning labels on cans and age restrictions for the purchase of these products.