



Energy drinks may be a red flag

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Health researchers have identified a surprising new predictor for risky behavior among teenagers and young adults: the energy drink.

Super-caffeinated energy drinks, with names like Red Bull, Monster, Full Throttle and Amp, have surged in popularity in the past decade. About a third of 12- to 24-year-olds say they regularly down energy drinks, which account for more than \$3 billion in annual sales in the United States.

The trend has been the source of growing concern among health researchers and school officials.

New research suggests the drinks are associated with a health issue far more worrisome than the jittery effects of caffeine – risk taking.

In March, *The Journal of American College Health* published a report on the link between energy drinks, athletics and risky behavior. The study's author, Kathleen Miller, an addiction researcher at the University of Buffalo, says it suggests that high consumption of energy drinks is associated with "toxic jock" behavior, a constellation of risky and aggressive behaviors including unprotected sex, substance abuse and violence.

The finding doesn't mean the drinks cause bad behavior. But the data suggests that regular consumption of energy drinks may be a red flag for parents that their children are more likely to take risks.

"It appears the kids who are heavily into drinking energy drinks are more likely to be the ones who are inclined toward taking risks," Dr. Miller said.

The American Beverage Association says its members don't market energy drinks to teenagers. "The intended audience is adults," said Craig Stevens, a spokesman.

Another worry is the increasing popularity of mixing energy drinks with alcohol.

Dr. Mary Claire O'Brien, associate professor at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C., surveyed college students at 10 universities in North Carolina. The study, published this month in *Academic Emergency Medicine*, showed that students who mixed energy drinks with alcohol got drunk twice as often as those who consumed alcohol by itself and were far more likely to be injured or require medical treatment while drinking.

Energy drink marketers say they don't encourage mixing the drinks with alcohol. Michelle Naughton, a spokeswoman for PepsiCo, which markets Amp, said, "We expect consumers to enjoy our products responsibly."

Tara Parker-Pope, The New York Times