

Red Bull gives you...a) tremors b) anxiety c) insomnia d) all the above

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After investigating the latest scares of energy drinks

By Kendra Davis and Mike Martinoli

'Caffeine intoxication'

"Caffeine intoxication:" it's the new catch phrase that experts are using to describe the detrimental effects of the energy drinks — Monster, Red Bull and Rock Star — that we all know and love. Because energy drinks are marketed as dietary supplements rather than food products, the companies that sell them do not have to label the amount of caffeine in these beverages, causing a major problem in the way we view them. The FDA maximum of 71 milligrams of caffeine per 12 ounces does not apply; most energy drinks contain hundreds of milligrams of caffeine per can.

"The caffeine content of energy drinks varies over a ten-fold range, with some containing the equivalent of 14 cans of Coca-Cola," says Ronald Griffiths, the co-author of a study conducted by researchers from Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, in an article in the Los Angeles Times.

Unaware of these statistics, teenagers and young adults, the drinks' targeted demographic, tend to view them as "performance enhancers" which can be consumed as regularly as a glass of orange juice when, in fact, having more than one of these per day can cause this so-called "caffeine intoxication." Side effects include anxiety, nervousness, restlessness, insomnia, pacing, tremors, a rapid heartbeat and digestive upset, according to Griffiths.

Making the excessive consumption of energy drinks even worse, students often pair their Monster or 5-Hour Energy shot with a candy bar or a Diet Coke, according to Dr. Marcia Costello, an assistant professor in the College of Nursing. "This causes them to consume a lot more caffeine than they may even be aware of."

She notes that many caffeine consumers do not know the difference between being more awake and more alert. While most believe that caffeine is a substitute for sleep, the increase in energy actually causes jitters and a greater inability to focus than before consumption.

But the problems with energy drinks don't stop there.

Energy drinks and your behavior

With some energy drinks containing 430 milligrams per 12 ounces, it was hard for Kathleen Miller of the University of Buffalo and her colleagues to believe that consumers' energy levels and subsequent bodily functions were the only things affected by the dangerous beverages. After conducting a study, they found a correlation between the high consumption of energy drinks and a collection of behaviors known as "toxic jock syndrome," which includes substance abuse, unprotected sex and violence.

Energy drinks and your hygiene

We've all heard that large amounts of caffeine can cause problems for pregnant women, children and adults with hypertension, as well as heart disease or mental health ailments like anxiety. But they also affect us, particularly by ruining our teeth. According to an article on ScienceDaily.com, a beverage's "buffering capacity" is its ability to neutralize the acid which plays a significant role in the cause of dental erosion. In a study examining the acidity levels of five popular beverages on the market, drinks such as Red Bull and Monster were found to have the highest mean buffering capacity, which means a high potential for erosion of tooth enamel. Because adolescents have "immature enamel," their permanent teeth are particularly susceptible to such erosion.

"The results, if not treated early and if extensive, can lead to very severe dental issues that would require a full mouth's rehabilitation to correct," says Raymond Martin, DDS, spokesperson for the Academy of General Dentistry.

Energy drinks and alcohol

According to an article in the Los Angeles Times, 27 percent of college students reported mixing energy drinks with alcohol at least once per month.

Because caffeine is a stimulant and alcohol is a depressant, when people mix the substances they feel less intoxicated than they actually are, causing them to drink more than they normally would.

In an article published by NaturalNews.com, researcher Mary Claire O'Brien of Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C. said, "you're every bit as drunk; you're just an awake drunk."

Researchers surveyed 10 North Carolina universities about mixing alcohol and energy drinks and found that "students who mixed the drinks got drunk twice as often, were more likely to be injured or require medical treatment while intoxicated and were more likely to perpetrate or experience sexual assault than students who drink alcohol alone," according to an article published by the International Herald Tribune.

Costello claims that combining energy drinks and alcohol is one of the biggest concerns on college campuses today, and she's right. Junior Craig Durrant, who has been promoting Monster on campus since his friend's brother handed the job down to him, can attest to that fact.

"I know that students mix the energy drinks with alcohol all the time," says Durrant, who, along with the other promoters, hands out 25 free cases of Monster per month and takes pictures of the consumers for publicity. The representatives don't receive any education about the drinks from Monster.

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