

Caffeinated energy drinks

Caffeinated energy drinks (energy drinks) are advertised as being able to boost your energy and make you feel more alert. Common brands include Red Bull® and Rockstar Energy®.

Children and teens are the highest consumers of energy drinks. This despite warnings on the label and guidance from the Canadian Pediatric Society against their use. Parents and caregivers should be aware of the risks and side effects.

If you choose to consume energy drinks, use them with caution. Check the label for the caffeine content. Follow the warnings and consumption limits.

What ingredients are in energy drinks?

Energy drinks contain caffeine, sugar or sugar substitutes, flavourings, and often a combination of vitamins and minerals. Sometimes herbs and other substances are added. They come in a variety of flavours like fruit punch, strawberry and blueberry.

Health Canada limits the types and amounts of many of these ingredients through *Supplemented foods regulations*. The amounts are within safe levels when used according to the directions on the label.

Caffeine

The total amount of caffeine in an energy drink is listed on its label. All sources of caffeine, both synthetic and natural, count towards the total amount. Yerba mate, guarana and black tea are examples of natural sources of caffeine. Health Canada allows up to 180mg of caffeine per container.

Energy shots are different than energy drinks. They are a concentrated source of caffeine in a small container, usually no bigger than 90mL. Energy shots can have up to 200mg of caffeine per container. The same precautions for using energy drinks apply to energy shots.

Most healthy adults can have up to 400 mg of caffeine per day. The maximum safe amount for children and youth is much lower and depends on their body weight. The caffeine in one energy drink or energy shot often exceeds this safe amount. Too much caffeine can:

- Disrupt sleep and impact mental and physical health
- Cause increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Lead to anxiety, digestive problems and dehydration

Drinking enough water, getting adequate sleep, and having regular meals and snacks can all help to boost energy without relying on caffeine.

Sugar

The amount of sugar in energy drinks can be as high, or higher, as the amount in other sugary drinks such as soft drinks. Many energy drinks contain 10 to 15 teaspoons (40 to 60 grams) of sugar per can. Check the label to see how much sugar the product contains.

Sugary drinks are the main source of sugar in the average Canadian diet. Children and youth have the highest daily intake of these drinks. Consuming large amounts of sugary drinks as a child or teen can impact future eating habits and health.

Sugar substitutes

Some energy drinks use sugar substitutes, like aspartame, sucralose or stevia, as sweeteners. If you regularly drink sweet beverages, you might find that it's harder to eat healthy because you:

- Develop a preference for sweet foods
- Choose energy drinks instead of water and nutritious drinks like milk

Vitamins and minerals

The amount of vitamins and minerals in one energy drink is safe for most healthy adults. Avoid drinking more than the label recommends.

The amount of vitamins and minerals may exceed what is safe for children and teens. Some vitamins, like vitamin A, are stored in the body and build up over time. Having high amounts of certain vitamins and minerals can harm health.

Who should avoid energy drinks?

Children, teens, people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or sensitive to caffeine should avoid energy drinks. The labels of all energy drinks have a warning for these vulnerable groups.

Caffeine and other ingredients in energy drinks can interact with many medications. Talk with a pharmacist or your health care provider before using energy drinks if you:

- Take medications or supplements
- Have a health condition

Is it safe to mix energy drinks with alcohol?

No. Caffeine acts as a stimulant and masks the effects of alcohol. This can cause people to drink larger amounts of alcohol, putting them at greater risk for car accidents, violence and risky behaviours such as unsafe sex.

Are sports drinks different than energy drinks?

Yes. Sports drinks, like Gatorade® and Powerade®, are designed to rehydrate the body after intense exercise. Some sports drinks are high in sugar. Others contain sugar substitutes. They typically do not have caffeine.

Sports drinks are not needed for most children and teens who are physically active. Water is the best source of hydration. For those involved in prolonged and vigorous activities, like a hockey tournament, a sports drink may be helpful.

It's easy to confuse sports drinks with caffeinated energy drinks because the packaging is similar. Be sure to read the label carefully.

For more information

Health Canada: Sugary drinks
<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/make-water-your-drink-of-choice/sugary-drinks/>