



Caffeine is certainly not a new substance. It is naturally found in things we have been consuming for thousands of years including tea leaves, coffee beans, and cacao and has been associated with improved mental and physical performance in adults. What is new is a group of products called “energy drinks” that contain, among other ingredients, varied amounts of caffeine. While moderate amounts of caffeine are considered safe for most healthy adults, the safety of energy drinks has become the topic of recent debate.



How much caffeine are you getting?

Caffeine is not considered a nutrient, so you won't always find the amount of caffeine listed on a product's label. Estimates of the caffeine content of energy drinks vary greatly with some containing less than coffee and others containing more. If you are concerned about your overall caffeine intake, it may be best to avoid products that contain caffeine but don't list how much.



Energy Drinks in the Mix

Another trend associated with energy drinks is combining them with alcohol. The FDA has issued warnings to companies producing caffeinated alcoholic beverages that they do not meet safety standards. Concern around this combination comes from the ability of caffeine to mask some of the feelings that typically alert people to how much alcohol they have taken in. This false sense of sobriety may lead to risky behaviors like driving when you shouldn't, or drinking more than you typically would.



Not for Kids

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, energy drinks “are not appropriate for children and adolescents and should never be consumed.” The AAP's concerns are focused around the safety of stimulant ingredients, including caffeine, and their impact on children's health.



Bottom Line

The key to staying energized is to eat well, stay active and get enough sleep. Moderate intake of energy drinks in healthy adults is likely safe, but probably not the best way to achieve long term energy.



REFERENCES:

1. FDA Consumer Health Update: Serious Concerns Over Alcoholic Beverages with Added Caffeine. www.fda.gov/forconsumers/ConsumerUpdates. November 2010.
2. FDA Basics: Why isn't the amount of caffeine a product contains required on a food label? www.fda.gov.
3. American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Nutrition and the Council on Sports Medicine. Clinical Report—Sports Drinks and Energy Drinks for Children and Adolescents: Are They Appropriate? Pediatrics Volume 127, Number 6, June 2011.