

# What's the Buzz with Energy Drinks?



Energy drinks claim to boost alertness, shorten reaction time, improve concentration, memory, and performance in endurance and anaerobic exercise. Athletes are turning to energy drinks in the hopes of boosting their energy and quenching their thirst.

Energy drinks promise to “pep you up”. Sadly, the wake-up buzz from energy drinks is short lived and may be followed by a prolonged period of crash and burn. There is no replacement for good old fashioned sleep, recovery, and putting in your time at the gym.

## CAN ENERGY DRINKS HYDRATE YOUR BODY?

Energy drinks should not be confused with sport drinks which are designed to rehydrate the body during exercise. In fact, energy drinks can impair hydration. The American Council of Sports Medicine (ACSM) states “[energy] drinks are a very poor choice to consume when exercising in the heat or probably when exercising in general.” Because they pack twice the amount of sugar as sport drinks, fluid absorption in the body is impaired, delaying hydration. While energy drinks may taste refreshing, they should not be consumed before, during, or after exercise when you need to replace sweat loss.

### More Bad News:

Consuming beverages high in sugar and caffeine such as energy drinks, before or during exercise, may have a laxative effect in some people.

## ARE SUGAR FREE ENERGY DRINKS OKAY?

Sugar free energy drinks include artificial sweeteners such as sucralose (Splenda™), aspartame (Equal™), or acesulfame k. These beverages do a better job at hydration than regular energy drinks because they have less sugar. Still, they contain a number of artificial ingredients and they should not be consumed on a regular basis.

## WHAT'S IN THE ENERGY DRINKS?

Energy drinks contain caffeine, sugar, taurine, and glucuronolactone – a combination that is claimed to improve performance. Energy drinks also may contain very small amounts of Echinacea, L-carnitine, vitamin C, ginkgo biloba, ginseng, ciwujia, hydroxycitrate, and St. John's Wort. There is little evidence that ingredients other than the sugar and caffeine have any positive effects on performance. Many energy drinks also contain very high doses of B vitamins, which are likely to be excreted in the urine.

## WILL ENERGY DRINKS LEAD TO A POSITIVE DOPING TEST?

Energy drinks may be tainted with prohibited substances. Some energy drinks contain many raw herbs that have not been tested for purity or contamination and could lead to a positive doping test.

## ARE ENERGY DRINKS REALLY BAD FOR ME?

ACSM states that “[energy drinks] have the potential for adverse and dangerous effects if taken in excessive quantities or consumed while on medication.” These effects include electrolyte disturbances, heart irregularities, nausea, and vomiting. To avoid any harmful effects:

- Do not exceed the recommended serving indicated on the bottle
- Do not mix an energy drink with alcohol

*\* Health Canada recommends children consume no more than 50 mg of caffeine daily.*

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