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Energy Drinks – Who Needs Them?

they could be doing more harm than good

There's no doubt they are popular, particularly with the kids, and flavour is a big drawcard. They even seem to be taking over from standard sodas like Coke and Pepsi. That might be considered a bonus, because everyone knows the percentage of sugar is high in them; but the same applies to energy drinks because that's one of the essential ingredients. As for caffeine, there's plenty of this in both types. It would be expected in sports drinks, being a stimulant; but for what purpose? The majority of people who drink this stuff all the time, can after can, aren't athletes. Many are unlikely to get 30 minutes exercise a day, little of it energetic; and a walk down the road and back certainly doesn't warrant loading up the body with carbs and other unnecessary substances that can do some real harm.

So, who needs energy drinks? Athletes for sure, when they are engaged in strenuous activities and burning carbs. They also need to replace fluid lost through perspiration, along with essential sodium, potassium and electrolytes; and there's no doubt that caffeine enhances performance. Then there are manual workers who expend more than the usual amount of energy, particularly in situations when ambient temperatures stimulate heavy sweating. In these cases, dehydration is a problem that requires fixing, often quickly, and energy drinks will do that. For most, however, frequent top-ups of plain water are quite adequate.

Adults should have the sense to do the right thing by their bodies; and if they don't, they only have themselves to blame. As for their children, trying to educate them with respect to healthy options isn't easy, not when a culture has developed which overrides medical advice. For those parents who happen to know their children are consuming large amounts of sports and energy drinks on a regular basis, here is some food for thought:

Research suggests that **caffeine overdose** can lead to palpitations, high blood pressure, nausea and vomiting, convulsions and, in some cases, even death! And that's not all. Consider these:

- There's the risk of Type 2 diabetes, because a high consumption of caffeine reduces insulin sensitivity.
- The chance of late miscarriages, low birth-weight and stillbirths in pregnant women.
- Neurological and cardiovascular system effects in children and adolescents.
- Promotion of sensation-seeking behaviour.
- A tendency towards addiction leading to the use and dependence on other harmful substances.
- Poor dental health.
- Obesity

According to the American Heart Foundation, “energy drinks can cause potentially harmful changes in heart function and blood pressure.” Apparently, the caffeine in an energy drink is absorbed into the bloodstream within 10 minutes, causing a rise in blood pressure and heart rate. After 15 to 45 minutes, the full effects will be felt resulting in short-term increased concentration and alertness. However, once the stimulant begins to wear off, there is a significant drop in blood sugar levels. The user then starts to feel tired and low in energy which, of course, can be quickly reversed by slugging another can. And so it goes on.

The effect high energy drinks have on children is of real concern, especially for some teachers who suggest they contribute to poor pupil behaviour. Unfortunately, there is a tendency towards addiction when excessive quantities are drunk daily. Over time it would be difficult to break the habit because withdrawal symptoms such as headaches or anxiety may be experienced. Noticing these signs is a warning that should not be ignored.

It would seem that energy drinks do have a place in the lives of some; but for most of us they are an expensive, totally unnecessary, and often dangerous addition to a normal diet that our general health can ill afford.

Put simply, energy drinks aren't worth the risk.

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