

Energy drinks: The coffee of a new generation?

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It's not uncommon for students to consume energy drinks to increase their concentration as they study throughout the night. "Energy drinks are the coffee of a new generation," says Stéphanie Côté, nutritionist with Extensio, a Université de Montréal health and nutrition think-tank. "These drinks are made up of sugar and caffeine and can have a negative impact on health."

According to a 2008 report by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 1.5 billion cans of Red Bull were sold in the United States in 2004. Consumption in Canada is said to be comparable and it is a growing trend for 18-to 24-year-olds. This market segment is broadening as younger children are beginning to consume these drinks before doing physical activity.

But these drinks aren't recommended to either athletes or children under the age of 12. "Energy drinks don't hydrate the body efficiently," says Côté. "Because they have too much sugar. And caffeine doesn't necessarily improve physical performance. In high quantities it can increase the risks of fatigue and dehydration."

Several studies have demonstrated that strong doses of caffeine can increase hypertension, cause heart palpitations, provoke irritability and anxiety as well as cause headaches and insomnia. Health Canada does not recommend consuming more than two cans per day.

But many young people do not respect this warning. Furthermore, close

to 50 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds claim to consume energy drinks mixed with alcohol. Vodka Red Bulls are in vogue despite warnings against the mix.

"Usually when someone consumes too much alcohol, their head spins and they feel tired. Energy drinks cancel out these warning signs," explains Côté. "The person feels good and therefore keeps drinking without realizing they are drunk."

Source: University of Montreal

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