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A Big Buzz

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Monster and Rock Star can produce cardiovascular symptoms.

A Big Buzz

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Caffeine is added to some gums and candy bars.

Many people accept sleep deficiency as normal in today's busy world. To stay awake and alert throughout the day, many turn to caffeinated beverages. The new energy drinks especially help to get one revved up for the activities of the day. Caffeine elevates blood glucose, giving the illusion of an energy surge.

The sale of energy drinks has skyrocketed in the U.S. during the past decade, with annual sales topping \$13 billion. Two-thirds of those using energy drinks are ages 13–35, with males consuming two-thirds of the market. When energy drinks are mixed with alcohol, a dangerous concoction results.

While a can of Coca-Cola or Pepsi contains 35 mg caffeine, Red Bull has 80 mg per 8 oz., Adrenaline Rush has 150 mg per 16 oz. can, Monster Energy has 160 mg per 16 oz. can, Jolt has 280 mg for a 24 oz. can, and Rock Star contains 360 mg of caffeine per 24 oz. can. These energy drinks compare to Starbucks coffee, which contains about 330 mg for a 16 oz. container. When an energy drink claims to have no added caffeine, it typically contains the herb guarana, a rich caffeine source.

Caffeine is considered a psychoactive substance since it stimulates the central nervous system and alters mood and behavior. The caffeine in energy drinks can boost the heart rate, elevate blood pressure, cause palpitations and increase the risk of cardiac arrhythmia. Energy drinks should not be used while exercising since the combination of fluid loss from sweating and the diuretic effect of caffeine can leave a person severely dehydrated.

Overuse of caffeinated beverages can cause one to feel jittery, restless, irritable, anxious and can trigger serious headaches. Caffeine interferes with adenosine, the brain's natural sleep regulator. It not only causes insomnia, but caffeine also



disrupts sleep patterns and diminishes the restorative effect of sleep. Too much caffeine may hurt a person's ability to concentrate, making it difficult to study.

Children consuming high levels of caffeine manifest hyperactive behavior. Due to their smaller body size, a young child consuming one can of Red Bull may receive a caffeine jolt equivalent to that received by an adult consuming 8–9 cups of coffee.

The regular use of caffeine can lead to dependency. People start to depend on the energy boost it provides and cannot get through the day without its stimulating effect. Regular users of caffeine who try to quit may experience

increased anxiety, headache, irritability and fatigue during the first few days of abstinence. These caffeine withdrawal symptoms are relieved temporarily by caffeine consumption, which contributes to the habitual use of the drug.

Soft drinks are not the only foods to contain added caffeine. Certain brands of instant oatmeal, gum, jelly beans, candy bars, potato chips and mints have caffeine as a food additive. It is believed that caffeine builds customer loyalty.

The use of highly-caffeinated energy beverages cannot be recommended, especially for children and pregnant women. Regular exercise, a balanced sleep schedule and stress management are useful lifestyle factors for maintaining your energy level.

Winston J. Craig is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.