

Energy Drinks: Are our children at risk?

By: Amanda Lavery

Does this sound like you? Two cups of coffee in the morning, a coffee break at 11 or so, another cup in the afternoon and a cup after dinner? That might be enough to interfere with sleep or even give some people the jitters, but it's nothing compared to what some teenagers are consuming to deal with schoolwork or job pressures.

In 2007, researchers in North Carolina surveyed college students and found that 51 percent consumed more than one energy drink per month to fight fatigue, increase energy, and drink more alcohol at parties. Around 20 percent of users reported jolts, crashes, headaches, and heart palpitations.

Since Red Bull was introduced to the U.S. market in 1997, energy drinks have enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity, especially among young adults. Sales increased by more than 16

percent last year with the brand, Monster, in the lead with 35 percent of the market.

This is not a new trend. Health experts have actually been trying to get our attention about the issue of energy drink consumption by kids for some time. In 2011, the Journal of Pediatrics published a scary report titled "Health Effects of Energy Drinks on Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults" warning that the consequences included "palpitations, seizures, strokes, and even sudden death." The authors also specifically warned parents that the drinks could be dangerous for kids with heart problems, diabetes, or ADHD.

Emergency room visits tied to energy drinks have also been on the rise, according to a report by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. A study found that the number of emergency department visits involving energy drinks jumped from 1,128 visits in 2005 to 16,053 in 2008 and 13,144 in 2009.

Warning Signs of Caffeine

Overdose

Sleep problems
Nervousness
Rapid pulse
Inability to be attentive
Tremors
Palpitations
Fainting
Difficulty breathing
Chest pains

Five Deaths Linked to Monster Energy Drink

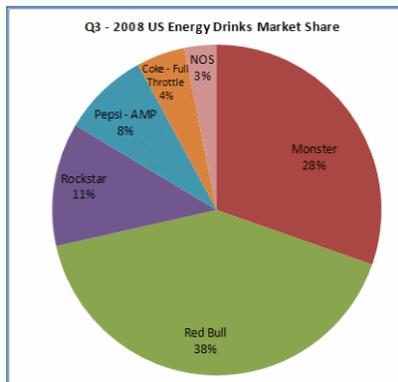
The Food and Drug Administration is investigating reports that five people died and one survived a heart attack after consuming the energy drink- Monster. It is not yet clear whether the drinks actually caused – or even contributed to - those adverse events, said FDA spokeswoman Shelly Burgess.

"So far there's been no causal link," Burgess said. "There could have been other products involved. We don't know that yet and that's why we're taking this seriously and looking into it."

A Maryland couple filed suit against Monster last week claiming the drink caused the death of their 14-year-old daughter, Anais, in December 2011. The teen had consumed two Monsters within a 24-hour period and that, combined with an inherited disorder that weakens blood vessels around her heart, resulted "cardiac arrhythmia due to caffeine toxicity" and her untimely death.

"Anais had consumed two 24-oz. Monster Energy drinks in a 24-hour period, the last drink just hours prior to her death," her lawyer, Kevin Goldberg of Silver Spring, Md., said in a statement.

Why are energy drinks so tempting to our teens?



Graph results are not confirmed by The Cooper Firm.

Energy drinks are the fastest growing segment of the beverage market in the United States with billions of dollars sold each year. A new report claims that the increase in the consumption of these energy drinks is not a coincidence but rather a result of a clever marketing campaign directly aimed at our teens.

Companies are reaching children through product placement on primetime TV, the Internet, social media and celebrity endorsements. In 2010, teens were exposed to 18 percent more TV ads and 46 percent more radio ads for energy drinks than adults. In 2010, teens saw 20 percent more TV ads for energy drinks than they did in 2008.

It's going to require the parents to take a stand against these energy drinks. With little to no warning labels on these drinks, we need to make it our mission to educate our teens about the dangers.

How much caffeine is too much?

Some people who take in 500 to 600 mg a day of caffeine may suffer insomnia, nervousness, restlessness, a fast heartbeat and stomach upset, according to the Mayo Clinic's website. The FDA limits the amount of caffeine in non-prescription drugs to a maximum of 200 mg per dose.

The body absorbs caffeine quickly. It shows up in the blood five minutes after someone eats or drinks it.

According to Karen Collins, a registered dietician at the American Institute for Cancer Research, it takes at least three hours to clear half the caffeine from the body, and 15 to 35 hours to eliminate it.

Caffeine is processed by the liver, so anything that stresses the liver can have the effect of keeping caffeine in the blood longer. This includes antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin, asthma medications and even herbal supplements such as Echinacea.

How would caffeine kill someone? It sparks the release of natural compounds called catecholamines, including norepinephrine, a stress hormone that can speed the heart rate. People who have died from documented caffeine overdose had irregular and rapid heart rates, seizures and sometimes choked on their vomit.

