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GRAHAK SATHI

Beware of High Caffeine and Sugar in Energy Drinks



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Should You Be Having Energy Drinks

In recent years there has been a surge in the consumption of Energy Drinks, especially among urban youth, fitness enthusiasts, and students. These beverages are often used as a quick fix for fatigue or an energy booster during long work or study hours. They have become a symbol of modern fast-paced lifestyles. However, there is a growing concern about their health implications, especially considering the low awareness about their caffeine content among consumers.

What Are Energy Drinks

Energy Drinks are non-alcoholic water-based beverages that boost energy, alertness, and mental performance. They contain high levels of caffeine, sugar, and other stimulants. Red Bull, Monster, Raze, Sting, Hell etc. are some of the popular Energy Drink brands available in India.

Energy Drinks are quite often confused with sports drinks, but both are fundamentally different. Sports drinks help replenish fluids and electrolytes lost during physical exertion, whereas Energy Drinks stimulate the nervous system, providing a temporary feeling of increased alertness and energy.

FSSAI Regulations and Labelling Requirements

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has set certain standards for Caffeinated Beverages or Energy Drinks.

- Limits on caffeine levels - Caffeinated or Energy Drinks should have caffeine in the range of 145mg/litre to 300mg/litre (14.5mg/100ml to 30mg/100ml).
- Maximum caffeine content allowed is 300mg/litre or 30mg/100ml.
- Labelling Requirement for Energy Drinks or Caffeinated Beverages:
 - Must mention on label - 'Caffeinated Beverage'. They cannot be branded as just 'Energy Drink'.
 - Mandatory labelling of caffeine content - The exact caffeine amount must be given.
 - High caffeine warning must be given.
 - Mandatory consumption warning - 'Consume not more than 500 ml per day'.
 - Mandatory health caution display on packaging - "Not recommended for children, pregnant or lactating women, and persons sensitive to caffeine".

However, many imported brands are available in the market which may not adhere to all the labelling requirements.

The increase in Energy Drinks' consumption is due to several factors. Urban lifestyles with long working hours and increased screen time lead people to seek quick sources of energy. Gyms, sports events and social media influencers glamorize the consumption of Energy Drinks. Brands often target the youth through sports sponsorships, gaming events, and social media campaigns. Attractive packaging and slogans like "Gives You Wings" or "Unleash the Beast" and product placement in music videos and action films are also used by brands. And above all, these products are easily available everywhere.

As a responsible consumer you should always read labels and be aware and watchful of what you consume for your own health.





Adverse Health Effects of Energy Drinks

The key ingredients in Energy Drinks are typically caffeine, sugar, and other stimulants such as taurine, guarana, and B vitamins. Other ingredients include artificial sweeteners, colours and flavours, preservatives and other additives. Given below are the key ingredients present in Energy Drinks along with their effect on health.

Caffeine: Caffeine is the ingredient of main concern in Energy Drinks. It is a known stimulant that can improve focus, increase alertness and delay fatigue. However, excessive intake can lead to insomnia, increased heart rate, anxiety, jitteriness, dehydration, digestive issues, dependency and withdrawal symptoms. Caffeine intake of 400 mg/day is generally considered safe for healthy adults.

Our label study of popular Energy Drink brands shows that most of these contain 30mg of caffeine per 100 ml, which is the maximum limit of caffeine allowed in Energy Drinks. This means that one 250ml can of Energy Drink contains 75mg of caffeine and a 350ml can contains more than 100mg of caffeine. Be aware that you also get caffeine from tea, coffee, certain medicines, colas etc. Hence, unless you are watchful while consuming Energy Drinks you can easily exceed safe consumption limit.

Sugar: Most Energy Drinks contain sugar 11g/100ml or more, which means that a single 250ml can may contain more than 27g (5 Teaspoons) of sugar. The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) per day for Sugar for adults is 20g to 30g. That means that one can of Energy Drink exceeds your daily sugar RDA. High sugar consumption is associated with obesity, type 2 diabetes, dental problems, and cardiovascular diseases. Sugar free variants of Energy Drinks as well as some regular variants contain different artificial sweeteners.

Taurine: All Energy Drinks studied contain 400mg/100ml of Taurine. Taurine is an amino acid often added to Energy Drinks for its supposed cognitive benefits. Taurine is generally not considered to be harmful in moderate amounts.

Guarana: This is a plant extract often present in Energy Drinks that contains natural caffeine, increasing the overall stimulant content of the drink.

B Vitamins: Vitamins B2, B3, B5, B6, B12 are added to Energy Drinks to support energy metabolism. While essential, excessive intake through supplements or fortified drinks may stress the liver.

Other Additives: Energy Drinks contain artificial colours and flavourings, preservatives, stabilizers etc., some of which may not be safe for regular consumption.

Health Risks you Should Know about

- Short-Term Effects of consuming Energy Drinks regularly or in excess include rapid heartbeat, headaches, jitters or tremors, dehydration, nausea and vomiting.
- Long-Term Risks include increased risk of heart disease and hypertension, liver damage (especially when mixed with alcohol), addiction due to regular caffeine exposure, behavioural issues among adolescents, such as restlessness, aggression, and sleep disturbances.



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What Should Consumers Do

Energy Drinks may seem like a harmless pick-me-up, but their unchecked consumption carries serious health risks, especially among young adults. As consumers, you must become more conscious of what you put into your bodies. Understanding the ingredients, questioning marketing narratives, and making informed choices can go a long way in protecting your health and that of future generations.

- **Read the Label Carefully:** Check for caffeine content, sugar levels, and additives. Look for FSSAI approval and warning labels.
- **Understand Your Limits:** Up to 400mg of caffeine per day is considered safe for healthy adults. But Energy Drinks are not the only source, tea, coffee, chocolates, and some medicines also contain caffeine. Be aware of your total caffeine consumption during the day when you choose to pick up and have an Energy Drink.
- **Avoid Use by Children and Teens:** Health experts strongly discourage Energy Drink consumption by anyone under 18. Instead, natural energy boosters like fruits, nuts, or a good night's sleep are better alternatives.
- **Do not mix Energy Drinks with Alcohol:** Never consume Energy Drinks with alcohol, no matter the occasion or peer pressure. Mixing with Alcohol can mask the effects of intoxication, leading individuals to drink more than they should. This can increase the risk of alcohol poisoning, cause risky behaviour and accidents, and can lead to heart complications.
- **Choose Healthier Alternatives:** Healthier alternatives to Energy Drinks include herbal teas, natural fruit juices, homemade fruit smoothies, coconut water, and just plain water. These provide hydration, essential nutrients, and a moderate energy boost without the negative effects of excessive caffeine or sugar.
- **Hydrate yourself:** Staying hydrated is important, as even mild dehydration can lead to fatigue and reduced concentration.
- **Stay active:** Incorporating regular physical activity and getting enough sleep are crucial for maintaining steady energy levels throughout the day.

The real energy we need comes not from a can, but from balanced nutrition, regular exercise, good sleep, and mental well-being. Let us not trade long-term health for a few moments of artificial energy.

Links to our recent issues

1. Buying Guide for Air Cooler
2. How to Select the Right Air Conditioner
3. Grahak Sathi Yuva (May 2025)
4. Take Travel Insurance to Protect Against the Unexpected
5. Grahak Sathi Educates and Empowers Consumers

Expert Speak

In this issue, Dr. Prabodh Halde, Head - Regulatory, Marico Ltd talks about **Food and Mood**.



Dr. Prabodh Halde

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Quick Tips to Stay Hydrated with Healthy Drink Choices

- To avoid dehydration, drink adequate water to meet the daily fluid requirements.
- Opt for freshly made juice from fresh fruits instead of packaged fruit juices. However, it is best to eat the whole fruit instead of juicing it.
- Consume homemade cool drinks like butter milk, nimbu paani, aam panna, jaljeera, etc. as beverages in hot weather. Avoid synthetic soft drinks and carbonated beverages.
- Commercially available drinks contain additives like colouring agents, preservatives, sweeteners and flavours which are harmful to health. Hence consumption of these drinks should be avoided.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.

