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healthy living



More and more people are enjoying energy drinks like these. But doctors are concerned about all the extra caffeine being consumed — especially by young people. MARY FRANK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

RISKY BUSINESS

Energy drinks can pose unexpected health hazards, especially to young adults

By Susan Bloom
 For the Asbury Park Press

In the last 5 years, they've popped up everywhere — popular canned drinks promoting increased energy, vitality and endurance, often touted as healthy alternatives based on their range of added vitamins, minerals and herbs.

And the market has responded: Leading U.S. energy drink company Monster Energy, for example, saw its drink sales triple in the last five years to nearly \$1.6 billion in 2011.

But as sales of these mass-market energy drinks by companies like Monster, Red Bull, Rockstar, and 5-Hour Energy have grown, they've been met with the rise of another, more concerning trend — an increase in emergency room visits related to their excessive consumption.

According to a recent survey by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. emergency room visits related to the consumption of energy drinks doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 between 2007 and 2012.

And while energy drinks still represent less than 5 percent of the entire carbonated soft drink market, according to industry tracker Beverage Digest, their sales are on the rise and target one of our nation's most vulnerable segments — teen and college-aged consumers.

Impact on health

According to the FDA, at least 18 deaths and hundreds of illnesses have been linked to the consumption of energy drinks in the last decade, a phenomenon that Dr. Michael Jones, chairman of CentraState Medical Center's Emergency Department in Freehold Township, attributes both to the drinks' ingredients and to the way they are chugged.

In addition to containing as much sugar as two to three standard-size candy bars, "energy-enriched caffeine drinks like Monster Energy contain 240 mg of caffeine, which can be up to six to seven times the amount in an average can of soda and two to three times the amount in an 8-ounce cup of coffee," Jones said.

"And while coffee is designed to be sipped over time," he noted, "Monster Energy drinks are available in wide-mouthed, 24-ounce 'Mega Monster'-size containers that are intended to be chugged," a challenge that overtired, party-loving, or exam-cramming teens and college-age kids may be all too apt to take.

Meanwhile, the American Beverage Association — the Washington, D.C.-based trade organization representing the nonalcoholic beverage industry, says that, regarding emergency room visits, that "there is no basis by which to understand the overall caffeine intake of any of these individuals from all sources."

ABA Director of Communications Maureen Beach added that labeling and marketing guidelines, among others, are included in the association's "Guidance for the Responsible Labeling and Marketing of Energy Drinks."

Caffeine connection

Present in a broad range of popular beverages worldwide, "caffeine is a stimulant that contracts the blood vessels and increases the heart rate," Jones said. "While it can make you more alert in the short-term, large doses can also cause jitteriness, anxiousness, irritability, difficulty concentrating, nausea/abdominal pain and a rapid heartbeat, and can also result in depression once the initial 'good feeling' following consumption wears off."

Consistent with national statistics, Jones has seen an uptick in energy drink-related visits to CentraState's emergency room over the past few years, particularly during school exam times and the summer season, but expressed concern over the often latent hazards the drinks can pose.

"Excessive consumption can trigger abnormalities like cardiac arrhythmia or diabetes, which are to that point undiagnosed and which kids may not even know they have," he said.

While he said that it takes 5,000 to 10,000 mg of caffeine to be considered toxic — the equivalent of

Dr. Michael Jones, chairman of CentraState Medical Center's Emergency Department, says he sees a rise in cases of over-consumption of caffeine.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CENTRASTATE



20 to 40 cans of Monster Energy consumed at once, a large amount for even the most ambitious consumer — "everyone's tolerance to caffeine is different, and these kids may be unaware of an underlying health condition."

Marketed as 'fun'

He said the issue is that the drinks are often "romanticized and marketed as fun" without sufficient warnings about side effects of excessive caffeine. (5-hour Energy does post label warnings).

The marketing, he said, "promotes the rapid consumption of a massive amount of caffeine and sugar to teens, an age group that's by nature more immature and reckless than other groups."

Jones said that victims of excessive energy drink consumption are often treated with a Valium-like sedative such as Benzodiazepam, which helps to slow the heart rate within 30 minutes. "But for patients with undiagnosed arrhythmia or diabetes who consume excessive amounts of energy drinks, by the time they seek medical attention, their situation could be fatal," he said.

"As Americans, we love our coffee," Jones said, "but everything in moderation. You don't know what underlying condition you might have that could be exacerbated by the high caffeine and sugar levels in energy drinks."

He pinpoints energy drinks as an example of a product that's cleverly marketed around parents and directly to teen consumers.

"Energy drinks might not affect the average consumer, but there's definitely risk associated with their use," he warned. "Parents need to have frank and open conversations with their teens regarding the consumption of these agents."

Green Tea: 8 ounces, 24 to 40 mg caffeine
Hot Chocolate: 8 ounces, 3 to 13 mg caffeine
Coca Cola Classic: 12 ounces, 30 to 35 mg caffeine
Diet Coke: 12 ounces, 38 to 47 mg caffeine
Mountain Dew: 12 ounces, 46 to 55 mg caffeine
5-Hour Energy: 2 ounces, 207 mg caffeine
"Mega" Monster Energy: 24 ounces, 240 mg caffeine

Source: The Mayo Clinic

FULLY LOADED

Following the 2011 death of 14-year-old Anais Fournier, a Maryland teen who suffered fatal cardiac arrest after consuming large amounts of Monster Energy Drink over a two-day period, legislators and the FDA have been investigating the effects of caffeine on human health and the potential need for caffeine limits or warning labels on energy drinks. The following chart shows how both energy drinks and other popularly-consumed beverages stack up in the caffeine department:

Brewed Coffee: 8 ounces, 95 to 200 mg caffeine
 Black Tea: 8 ounces, 14 to 61 mg caffeine



CANINE COMFORT
 Scan the code to read how therapy dogs help kids with autism.

People's Pharmacy

By Joe Graedon & Teresa Graedon

Doctor, patient disagree on statins

Q. Several years ago, when my cholesterol was 240, my doctor "ordered" me to take a statin, even though my triglycerides were low and my good HDL high. I pointed out that at age 60, I was able to hike at altitudes over 10,000 feet carrying a pack with very little effort and could easily jog six miles or more. He dismissed this and would not answer my questions about statins.

I wondered if he was concerned about liability, so I offered to sign a release statement showing he had directed me to take a statin and I had declined. He accepted. I am now closing in on 72, still jogging, still backpacking and still not taking statins.

A. The evidence that statins prevent initial heart attacks or prolong life in otherwise healthy people is weak (JAMA Internal Medicine, June 28, 2010).

We discuss the pros and cons of statins and offer many nondrug solutions in our Guide to Cholesterol Control and Heart Health. Anyone who would like a copy, please send \$3 in check or money order with a long (No. 10), stamped (66 cents), self-addressed envelope to: Graedons' People's Pharmacy, No. C-8, P.O. Box 52027, Durham, NC 27717-2027. It also can be downloaded for \$2 from our website: www.peoplespharmacy.com.

Q. My elderly mother hears actual songs in her ears. They keep her awake at night, which annoys her.

I read in the newspaper about someone who had this problem. There was a name for it, but I can't remember it.

This is the second time in two years she's had this trouble. The first time it went away on its own after three months.

A. Your mother ought to be evaluated by a neurologist. The sudden onset of an auditory hallucination could be a sign of something serious, such as Parkinson's disease or a tumor.

One reader wrote: "I was healthy and active at the age of 60. For several weeks, I heard music in my head and ignored it. Then I had a brainstem stroke."

Some medications can cause this symptom. Another person reported hearing a wonderful male chorus each evening after she started taking imipramine. As soon as she stopped the drug, the music disappeared.

Contact the Graedons at www.PeoplesPharmacy.com.

New calcium advisory

By Barbara Bronson Gray
 HealthDay

Healthy older women should not take calcium and vitamin D supplements to prevent fractures, according to a final recommendation issued last week by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

In healthy adults, lower doses of calcium and vitamin D seem to be ineffective. As for higher doses, it's still up in the air, the government group said Feb. 25.

The new recommendations do not apply to people who are known to be vitamin D-deficient or who already have osteoporosis, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) noted.

Every year about 1.5 million fractures in the United States are attributed to osteoporosis, which is caused by a decrease in bone mass and density that makes bones fragile and more susceptible to a break. Almost half of all women older than 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture in their lifetime, according to the USPSTF.

Calcium is one of the main building blocks of bone growth, and vitamin D (sourced via sunlight's action on the skin, or through diet) helps bones absorb calcium. But at issue is whether people receive enough of these nutrients in their daily diet, or if supplements would help protect them.

For the full story, visit www.app.com.

OFF AND RUNNING

Hey, kids! It's fun to run — and healthy, too

Editor's note: Welcome to Off and Running, a new column by Rob Cavanaugh, a local competitive runner and coach. Last year, Rob won the Belmar 5, along with other local 5ks and 5-milers. He lives in West Long Branch, and is married with three children.



Rob Cavanaugh

ically fit, and teach them respect and commitment. It also can lead to a healthier diet and better sleep.

Children are going to follow the lead set by the adults.

By making changes in your exercise regimen, you will benefit not only your health, but will likely improve the chances of your child wanting to get active and live a healthy lifestyle.

Running with your kids: You can help your child succeed in running by being an active participant. Start out by going

to a local track or park to walk and jog with your kids. Start out slow and, as time goes on, they will build endurance and feel like they can run without walking.

This is a great family activity that can help improve the fitness of everyone in your home. Before you know it, your kids will be asking you to race around the track, or in your local neighborhood.

Camps: Although running has many physical benefits, it's important to have a professional teach kids about proper running form and technique to prevent injuries.

There are local running camps that are designed to provide a fun, positive environment for all runners, while developing fitness and endurance. These camps focus on proper form and tech-

nique, specific training for all abilities and distances, along with fitness games and activities. They are great to bring kids together to train with other participants that are at the same age and ability.

Running offers kids the sense of freedom and the sense of reward and achievement when they finish.

Like so many individual sports that rely on self-motivation and hard work to achieve success, running teaches kids respect, commitment and confidence — all while building self-esteem.

For more information about kids running camps and adult training through RTC Training, contact Rob Cavanaugh, director, at 732-406-4454 or at rob@rtc-training.com. Learn more at www.rtc-training.com.