

Caffeinated energy drinks have researchers buzzing

Johns Hopkins scientist calls for warning labels

By Sara Michael
Examiner Staff Writer

Try downing a 12-ounce alcoholic drink — without knowing if it's beer or scotch.

"They have very different effects," said Roland Griffiths, a professor in the departments of psychiatry and neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Consumers take these risks, Griffiths said, when gulping one of the many caffeinated energy drinks on the market. Caffeine amounts range from 50 milligrams to 500 mg — more than 14 times the amount in a Coca-Cola — but the labels aren't always clear, he said.

Griffiths and other Hopkins researchers call for prominent labels noting caffeine doses and warning of potential harmful effects in an article appearing this month in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

Since the popular energy drink Red Bull hit U.S. stores more than a decade ago, hundreds of brands of energy drinks have emerged into a \$5.4 billion-a-year market, Griffiths said.

The ingredients vary, but most contain caffeine, as well as ingredients like taurine, B vitamins and other herbal additives, such as ginseng or mah jong.

In high doses, caffeine can cause increased heart rate, agitation, restlessness, insomnia, dizziness or even hallucinations, said Dr. Richard Colgan, associate professor of family and community medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

More concerning are the effects of mixing caffeine and other stimulants, such as pseudoephedrine and herbal supplements, he said.

The Food and Drug Administration does not limit the amount of caffeine a manufacturer can put in drinks, and foods labeled as dietary supplements aren't regulated.

The FDA advises that 0.02 percent caffeine content is "generally



Mike Gimbel, director of St. Joseph Medical Center's Powered By ME program, wants warning labels put on caffeinated energy drinks.

recognized as safe for cola-type beverages when used in accordance with good manufacturing practices," FDA spokeswoman Stephanie Kwisnek said.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest petitioned the FDA in 1998 for caffeine dose label requirements, but the FDA has not done so, said David Schardt, the center's senior nutritionist.

"My guess is they don't see a clear health problem consuming a lot of caffeine and they have their plate full with other things," he said.

Michael Gimbel, director of Powered By ME, an anti-steroid campaign at St. Joseph Medical Center, said the Johns Hopkins study supports a position he and other advocates have had for years.

Warning labels "are a beginning," to raise awareness of these drinks and encourage parents and consumers to consider the possible adverse effects, he said.

The American Beverage Association, however, blasted the report, saying researchers lumped all energy drinks together, when "the facts of their review clearly distin-

Energized drinks

Energy drink	Ounces per can/bottle	Total caffeine (mg)	Caffeine per ounce (mg)
Red Bull	8.3	80	9.64
Monster	16	160	10
Amp	8.4	75	8.93
Full Throttle	16	144	9
WiredX505	24	505	21.04
Other Drinks			
Coca-Cola	12	34.5	2.88
Pepsi	12	38	3.17

16-ounce soft drink: 60 mg caffeine

Mainstream energy drink: 160 mg

16-ounce cup coffee: 320 mg

Source: Roland Griffiths, Johns Hopkins

Source: American Beverage Association

guishes between the mainstream responsible players from novelty companies seeking attention," the industry groups said in a statement.

The caffeine doses in mainstream drinks are "moderate," the association said, and typically

contain half the amount of caffeine found in coffee sold at national chains.

"Quite simply," the association said, "energy drinks can be part of a balanced lifestyle when consumed sensibly."

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THE 3-MINUTE INTERVIEW

Roland Griffiths

Roland Griffiths, professor in the departments of psychiatry and neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, is the lead author of a study on caffeinated energy drinks.



How much research has been done about the effects of combining alcohol and energy drinks? There has been work done on the combined use of alcohol and caffeine, and we reviewed some of that work. There are number of different studies, but certainly a lot more could be done.

The most interesting piece and the reason it should be a concern is that when caffeine is added to alcohol, it decreases the ability for someone to recognize how intoxicated they are. They underestimate the amount of intoxication, but it doesn't alter their drunkenness.

They are at risk for not only consuming more alcohol than they would otherwise, but also are at risk for alcohol-related accidents.

And it has just become horrendously popular.

Mostly among college students? In one study, almost 30 percent of college students reported mixing alcohol and energy drinks in the last month. About 50 percent used more than three energy drinks per occasion. So it has been really popular, and if you go into most bars near college campuses, you find the Red Bull cooler.

And that isn't regulated? [The Canadian health department] includes a warning label on Red Bull and related drinks saying don't mix with alcohol. In the U.S., such warning labels don't exist.

What about alcoholic energy drinks? There was settlement recently this year in which 11 states' attorneys general had action against Anheuser-Busch, and they agreed to stop the sale of caffeinated alcoholic beverages. There is some — at least with big companies — some sensitivity to that and they were voluntarily pulled.

They are more aware of it, but that's not to say it's not a problem and there won't be more products of that sort. But we have this whole phenomenon of mixing alcohol with energy drinks, and it's leading to problems. — Sara Michael

Researchers: Pull plug on marketing energy drinks to kids

By Sara Michael
Examiner Staff Writer

With names like Amp, Rockstar and Full Throttle, caffeinated energy drinks market to young people — a group particularly vulnerable to the effects of too much caffeine, researchers and advocates said.

"It's clear the target group is athletically inclined young males," said Roland Griffiths, a psychiatry and neuroscience professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and lead author of a study on caffeinated energy drinks.

Children are less likely to use caffeine regularly, so they may feel the effects more, he said. And without consistent labeling, they may not know how much caffeine they are consuming, he said.

Michael Gimbel, director of Powered by

ME, an anti-steroid awareness campaign out of St. Joseph Medical Center, visits schools and other organizations to warn youth about the effects of performance enhancers, including caffeinated energy drinks.

Often young children recognize the cans he brings in as a display, he said, saying they drink the beverages.

"We are talking about 8-, 9-, 10-year-old children," he said. "They think they are sports drinks."

In his office, Gimbel has a collection of energy drinks he said are marketed toward children. One can shares its name with video game character Donkey Kong, and another called the Flaming Moe energy drink takes its name from a bartender on the widely popular cartoon "The Simpsons." Another product, Maxxed, comes in the form of a lollipop.

Griffiths also raised concerns these energy drinks could be a "gateway" to other forms of drug dependence. Some energy drinks, such as "Blow" and "Cocaine" glamorize drug use though their name and packaging, he said.

He pointed to one study of 1,253 college students that showed energy drink consumption "significantly predicted" later prescription stimulant use.

There should be restrictions on marketing these drinks to youth, Griffiths said.

The American Beverage Association, however, again faulted researchers for combining more mainstream energy drinks with the more extreme "novelty companies."

"Furthermore," the association said in a statement, "our companies market their energy drink products responsibly."

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