



# Energy drink, or not?

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**You have had a very** long day, and it is not even noon yet! Tired, unmotivated, lacking energy, but what can you

do? How about a hit from one of the dozens of so-called “energy drinks” or boosters? Will it help?

Someone looking over the selection in the soft drinks cooler at their neighbourhood QuickieMart might be hard pressed to find some of the traditional drinks; they are being crowded out by beautifully bottled and expensively marketed ‘energy drinks’ that promise to turn your day around. Nay! To improve your life even. Are they energy drinks, or something else?

Most of the choices you will find in the cooler are fuelled by caffeine, and little more. They are little more than a new way to package caffeine, a mildly addictive substance with plenty of side effects. There is also sugar, plenty of it.

Try this experiment: go into your kitchen and spoon out seven teaspoons of sugar into a saucer. Do you want to eat it? (But don’t!) That is about how much sugar there is in a can of energy drink, about the same as in a regular can of pop. Whatever benefits there may be, they are easily overwhelmed by the unwanted calories offering little nutritional value.

Other ingredients you might find in your energy drink include guarana (a natural, concentrated source of caffeine), maté (a type of herbal tea), B vitamins and ginseng. Of these, only the B vitamins might actually help energy levels. However, eating a relatively healthy diet will deliver sufficient B vitamins for your body’s needs so adding a few more via an energy drink will do nothing extra.

Which brings us back to caffeine. An average serving of ‘energy’ drink contains about 80 to 100mg of caffeine; a six-ounce cup of coffee will have 60 to 100mg in comparison. The jumbo gigante, tall grande popular with many will probably have about 200mg.

The effects of caffeine on a person vary widely. It will stay in the system for two to 10 hours, and its effects will vary by age, stress level, weight and other factors. Smokers break down caffeine faster; pregnant women, or those on the pill break it down slower. The effect on a child, will be dramatically different from that on an adult, especially due to weight differences.

Caffeine’s side effects include insomnia, nervousness, faster or irregular heartbeat, anxiety, headache, ringing in the ears, stomach upset including nausea and vomiting for some. Since it is also addictive, quitting can mean withdrawal symptoms such as headache, fatigue.

A healthy adult should consume no more than 450mg of caffeine daily. For a child up to 12 years, that amount should be no more than 45mg (youngest) to 85mg (oldest).

Consuming too much caffeine has been linked to health complications like interrupted sleep, headaches, and even giving birth to smaller babies. It is also been linked to increasing heart rate and blood pressure, which could mean unexpected conflicts for those with certain medical problems.

So where does all that ‘energy’ promised by an ‘energy’ drink come from? You guessed it: caffeine. Can we call that energy? Probably not.

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