

Are Energy Drinks Dangerous to Your Health?

By David Zinczenko with Matt Goulding // Mar 11, 2011

It's one of the greatest marketing tricks in the history of beverages: Turning a can of obesity-inducing sugar water into the coolest product in the supermarket. Here's how it's done.

1. Give your can of sugar water a hip-sounding name, like Monster, Rockstar, or Amp.
2. Promise that the product will do something exciting to your body, like boosting your energy and alertness, so you, too, can be a rock star—or at least stay up as late as one.
3. Make your product sound slightly dangerous. Anything will sound cooler when grown-ups hate it: Dr. Oz calls energy drinks “addictive” and “unhealthy.” Other experts point to thousands of caffeine overdoses among young people 19 and under.

But all the hoopla surrounding energy drinks is just hysteria, right? Sure, drinking them by the six-pack isn't a good idea, but in moderation, a single can of cold, tangy, eyeball-popping energy fuel can't be bad for you . . .

Or can it?

Well, the truth is that while you can call a product RockStar, a more accurate name for some of their drinks might be Fat Roadie. Because while massive doses of energy drinks are obviously dangerous, adding even a single can a day of some of them to your liquid intake could cause more than 29 pounds of weight gain in a year! Below, I've outlined some of the worst energy drinks, and some much saner alternatives. Making these simple swaps could be the difference between Lady Gaga, and Lady Gargantua.

WORST MORNING JOLT

5-Hour Energy (1.93-oz bottle)

4 calories

0 g sugars

Caffeine: 135 mg

Drink This Instead!

Black Coffee (12-oz cup)

0 calories

0 g sugars

Caffeine: 95-200 mg



What's really in 5-Hour Energy? Wouldn't you like to know! The company claims the product is packed with a variety of vitamins and other compounds that promote energy, but when *Consumer Reports* recently requested a copy of the supporting research, the company balked. Here's a golden rule of food and drink: If the company selling the

product won't put its money where its mouth is, don't put their product where your mouth is. Bottom line: The only proven ingredient in this bottle is caffeine, and one bottle contains about as much as a cup of coffee. You know what costs much less, contains loads of natural antioxidants, and also has as much caffeine as a cup of coffee? You guessed it, a cup of coffee. No energy drink on the planet is more reliable.

WORST CAFFEINATED DISASTER

Redline Power Rush (2.5-oz bottle)
0 calories
0 g sugars
Caffeine: 326 mg



Drink This Instead!

Sugar-Free Red Bull (8.4-oz can)
0 calories
0 g sugars
Caffeine: 75 mg

This is what happens when the companies that produce energy shots go to war with one another (7 hours of energy? Really?). Sipping this tiny bottle is the caffeine equivalent of gulping down about three cups of coffee, which is probably why the company's website warns minors not to drink it. Oh, and for those of us with family histories of high blood pressure, enlarged prostates, glaucoma, or any one of six other ailments, we need to consult a physician before use. The company also recommends you drink only half a bottle, but who's going to drink one-half of 2.5 ounces? That's like packing an Oreo in your kid's lunch and telling her to eat only one bite. Sugar-Free Red Bull offers the same low-cal advantage with a more reasonable amount of caffeine, which is about as much as a cup of coffee.

WORST SODA HYBRID

Amp Energy (16-oz can)
220 calories
58 g sugars
Caffeine: 142 mg



Drink This Instead!

Xenergy Mango Guava (16-oz can)
0 calories
0 g sugars
Caffeine: 180 mg

No energy drink exposes the blurred line between energy and soda better than Amp. It is, after all, an offshoot of Mountain Dew. The difference is it's shot through with more caffeine and all the dubious additives that give energy drinks their questionable energy appeal. But the problem with this can is the same problem that afflicts every other soda on the market—sugar. Guzzling this thing fills your stomach with 14 spoonfuls of sugar.

If it's energy you want, Xenergy promises all the same additives without any of the sugar. Consider it a modest vice.

WORST ENERGY SHOT

Clif Razz Energy Gel Shot (32 g package)

100 calories

12 g sugars

Caffeine: 0 mg



Drink This Instead!

Ito En Sencha Shot (6.4-oz can)

0 calories

0 g sugars

Caffeine: 40 mg

Be wary of any “energy” shot that comes in gel form. These packages are specifically formulated to replenish sugar stores to overworked muscles during bouts of high-intensity training. That's great if you're running a 10K, but if you're not doing some serious athletics, expect it to go straight to your thighs, butt, and belly. For a more sustainable—and less fattening—form of energy, opt for green tea. Ito En's Sencha Shot is just that, concentrated green tea laced with 152 milligrams of catechins, antioxidants that have been linked to weight loss. One of these tacked on to your daily routine can only do your body good.

WORST COFFEE BOOST

Starbucks Coffee Frappuccino (13.7-oz bottle)

290 calories

4.5 g fat (3 g saturated)

46 g sugars

Caffeine: 108 mg



Drink This Instead!

Rockstar Roasted Coffee + Energy Light Vanilla (16-oz can)

100 calories

14 g sugars

Caffeine: 240 mg

I'm not Rockstar's biggest fan, but they do a lot of things right, like this healthier alternative to Starbucks. Do you know how much whole milk you'd have to pour into your coffee to reach the 290 calories in this Starbucks bottle? Nearly two cups. Or how about this for comparison: This Vanilla Frappuccino has more calories than either a Snickers bar or a Wendy's Jr. Cheeseburger, plus it has more sugar than two scoops of Haagen-Dazs Crème Brûlée ice cream. Switch to Rockstar's lighter version of a caffeinated morning drink and you'll cut your calorie load by two-thirds!

WORST ENERGY DRINK

Vault Red Blitz (20-oz bottle)

290 calories

78 g sugars

Caffeine: 115 mg



Drink This Instead!

Rockstar Recovery (16 fl oz)

20 calories

2 g sugars

And here it is, the biggest loser in the battle of the energy drinks. Vault packs in more sugar than any other energy drink on the market. In terms of sheer calories, Starbucks Coffee Frappuccino fares just as bad, but even it can't claim to have more sugar than 3½ Hershey's Milk Chocolate bars. If you're looking for the daily energy beverage most likely to give you diabetes, this might be it. Otherwise, pick something with less sugar. Rockstar's Recovery is as fine as any energy drink on the market. It contains 160 mg of caffeine—about as much as 14 ounces of Dunkin' Donuts coffee—and it's flavored with lemon juice.