Energy Drinks

In recent years, an increase in consumption of energy drinks containing caffeine has led to concern among parents, teachers and physicians. Energy drinks are drinks designed to increase stamina and improve physical performance. Some are designed especially for elite athletes, but most are marketed and produced for the general public.

The primary energy-inducing ingredients in these drinks are caffeine, taurine and glucuronolactone. Some new drinks on the market also contain opium poppy seed extract or ephedrine.

Taurine is an amino acid that naturally occurs in the body. Amino acids help build protein. They are also believed to detoxify the body of harmful substances. During stress and high physical activity, the body can lose small amounts of taurine. There are other, more natural ways to provide your body with taurine, such as a diet rich in meat, fish and eggs.

Glucuronolactone also occurs naturally in the body. It is a natural metabolite and carbohydrate formed when glucose breaks down. Deficiencies are rare.

Caffeine is a stimulant which acts on the central nervous system to increase alertness and wakefulness and to achieve faster and more clear flow of thought.

Not enough is known about energy drinks and their effects on health and well-being. The producers of energy drinks make many claims about the health effects of their products. They state that their products can increase physical endurance, improve reaction time, boost mental alertness and concentration, eliminate waste from the body, etc. But one needs to be cautious in the consumption of these drinks.

Taurine and glucuronolactone occur naturally in the body, but the higher doses available in the drinks may be a cause for concern. Most of the energy drinks have 80mgs or more of caffeine per can. That is the same amount of caffeine as 2 sodas. For now, health authorities have determined that energy drinks are generally safe for consumption with...
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games as the side line medical expert with Dr. Kneidinger, also from the Upper Perkiomen office. Dr. Gerstberger’s sports interests stem from a lifetime of sports participation. He played lacrosse in both high school and college, being a member of the Penn State Lacrosse Club during its 3 year reign as National Champions (1999 – 2001)!

Being a Penn State graduate – a BS with honors in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, he continues to support Penn State at various sporting events, but now allows his enjoyment to extend beyond the Nittany Lions. He hikes with his family and 2 dogs – one a black lab and the other a pug, swims and camps with his wife Ashlynn and young son Nolan.

We welcome Dr. Gerstberger to TriValley Primary Care.

VACCINES FOR ADULTS
We all know that children need vaccines to protect them from various diseases, but did you know that adults also need vaccines?
• The Flu vaccine protects people of all ages from the flu virus each flu season. It is an annual immunization that is formulated to provide the greatest protection in the upcoming flu season.
• The pneumococcal vaccine protects adults from pneumonia and is suggested for patients with diabetes, coronary artery disease, or over age 65
• Zostavax vaccine protects adults from Shingles and is recommended by the CDC for adults age 60 or older.
• The Hepatitis A vaccine is suggested for those who travel or work in developing countries
• The Hepatitis B vaccine is suggested for adults who travel outside the U.S. where Hep B virus infection rates are high.
• The Tetanus vaccine is available in various forms, and may be pared to protect you against additional diseases such as pertussis and diptheria. Everyone should receive a tetanus shot every 10 years.

Despite the suggested need for some of the vaccines above, some may not be covered by your insurance policy. Please verify your coverage before scheduling any of the above.

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some cautions.
When thinking about whether or not to allow your child to drink an energy drink, consider these factors:

• Most energy have the same amount of caffeine as a strong cup of coffee. How many is your child drinking? Caffeine is known to evoke a tolerance in the individual, which means that an increasing amount is needed to achieve the same effect. Withdraw from caffeine can cause headache, irritability, inability to concentrate and stomachache within 12-24 hours after discontinuing use. Overuse of caffeine can cause nervousness, anxiety, insomnia, headache, bedwetting and transient increases in blood pressure.
• Little is known about the health effects of caffeine, so it is best to avoid giving children under age 10 products containing caffeine. Older children and young people should be careful too. The human brain continues to grow until the age of 16 (some say 21 years). We know caffeine affects the human brain, but we don’t know how.
• Some energy drinks have the sugar content equivalent to 5 teaspoons of sugar per can.
• There is little (if any) evidence of nutritional value on most energy drinks. Some are said to include natural vitamins and minerals, but these can be obtained from natural sources like fruits and vegetables.

Other individuals who should be cautious with their use of energy drinks or high caffeine use are pregnant women. The risk of miscarriage and low-weight infants increases with high amounts of caffeine consumption. Active sportspeople also need to be caution as the diuretic effect of caffeine (increasing urine flow) can cause dehydration during a hard or long workout. Finally, people with heart disease or those prone to palpitations and stomach ulcers also need to be concerned about their caffeine consumption.

Be smart. Don’t overuse. Don’t believe everything the advertisers tell us. And know what your children are eating and drinking.

Information for this article was collected from AAFP, Wikipedia, www.energydrinks.factexpert.com and www.medicalnewstoday.com

Comments? If you have comments or ideas for other topics, contact the editor at: Editor, Primarily You, c/o TriValley Primary Care Corporate Office 519 S. Fifth St., Suite 130; Perkasie, PA 18944-1042 Email: py@trivalleypc.com