

**PENNY SAVER NEWS HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

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Need Energy?

You've made your New Year's Resolutions, right? Or you've made your list of chores for the day. Now if you only had the energy to get them all done - is that the problem? We all start out with the best of intentions, then seem to run out of steam. Our snacks and beverage industry is more than happy to come to our assistance, with dozens of "Energy Drinks", guaranteed they say to pep us up and keep us going. But is that really what we need? What's really in those drinks anyway?

Since there is no legal or official definition of an 'energy' drink, a manufacturer is free to put anything not banned from food use into the can. The *claim* of course is that they will give you more energy. If they do it, and how they do it, are other questions.

Do they really increase your energy? There are a few reliable studies that say Yes. Some of the drinks at least do wake some people up, improve their driving ability when tired, and may help them concentrate. Since these are small studies they are no guarantee that the drinks will help YOU, even if you use the same product that was tested.

Most of the drinks also make other claims. Some say they'll improve your sexual performance, help you lose weight, protect you from cancer or lower your cholesterol. These promises are more like 'pie in the sky'. Yohimbine for example does increase blood flow, but there's no evidence it increases sexual drive or performance. Taurine is an amino acid, an ingredient of protein. While it might help a little with blood pressure control, there's nothing to show that it really helps prevent diabetes or cures epilepsy. And carnitine, another type of amino acid, has no evidence behind its claims to increase endurance or weight loss.

But even if they don't do everything they claim, will they hurt you? Again, there is very little evidence to prove either that they are safe, or that they are harmful. Using them makes you a human guinea pig, with no one on hand to check your symptoms. Most rely on high doses of caffeine and caffeine-like ingredients along with large amounts of sugar. The caffeine wakes you up and the sugar gives you the energy to keep moving.

An 8 ounce serving of most of the energy drinks has as much caffeine as about 14 to 16 ounces of cola soda, but not as much as a cup of brewed coffee. Most adults can handle up to 400 mg of caffeine a day without suffering any ill effects. A single serving of energy drinks wouldn't put you over that level, but a full can might. Several cans certainly will. Even if the label only claims 'all natural guarana', that's caffeine under another name. One gram of guarana has about 40 mg of caffeine. Ginseng will also increase the effects of the caffeine. And while a cup of black coffee has only 5 calories, these drinks pack 100 calories or more per cup.

Plain caffeine does increase endurance for exercise. That's why it is not allowed at the Olympics. What the herbals and other ingredients combined with caffeine might do to your body is not known. That's why it's not a good idea to drink these products before heavy exercise. Mixing energy drinks and alcohol is another risky choice. You won't feel the effects of the alcohol, but your coordination and reaction time will be affected just as much. You might feel awake, but your driving will still be terrible.

Finally, children and teens should avoid these products. Their younger bodies react more strongly to even less caffeine, mainly by increasing blood pressure. Not more than 100 mg of caffeine a day is recommended for them. There are much more healthy ways to increase your energy than chugging a caffeine and sugar-loaded can of drink.

Here's another recipe from our new Simply Florida cookbook, an interesting drink to wake you up. You can serve it as dessert with or without the ice cream. If you use

the rum, be sure to have a designated driver to get you home.

#### Coffee Punch

2 quarts strong brewed coffee	2 cups low fat milk
½ cup sugar or sweetener equivalent	1 tsp vanilla extract
1 cup half and half	(1 cup dark rum optional)
1 quart vanilla or chocolate ice cream or low fat frozen yogurt	

Combine coffee, milk, sugar and vanilla in bowl or large pitcher and stir until sugar dissolves. Cover and chill. To serve, stir in half and half and rum if using. Put scoops of ice cream into serving bowl. Pour coffee over ice cream, stir and serve in punch cups. Serves 20.

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