

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Have you grabbed a Sobe Adrenaline Rush or a Java Water in a rush through the convenience store? Or did you simply get a cup of percolated coffee instead of your usual instant brew? If so, you probably noticed the sudden surge in your energy level. If you were lucky you only noticed a headache later, or just lay awake for a few extra hours into the morning, wondering why you couldn't get to sleep. What if you weren't lucky? Too much of the 'energy' in energy drinks can lead to heart palpitations, anxiety attacks and stomach complaints.

Of course, that 'instant energy' is not from sugar in most of those bottled drinks, although there is plenty of it! It wasn't from the three packets of sugar you added to your cup of coffee either. That jolt was all the caffeine hitting your system.

Caffeine is probably the least-regulated and most-used drug in the world for adjusting our mood. While not the only one, the main source of caffeine in our diets used to be coffee. Now however there are dozens of drinks available in bottles, cans or cups, from grocery aisles to convenience store shelves, ready to grab and go.

FDA does mandate that labels tell us when a drink contains caffeine. But there is no requirement that it tells us how much. The FDA recommends, but again can not mandate, that drinks limit the amount of caffeine to under 65 mg in a 12 ounce serving of colas. So a recent study by a University of Florida team brought a few surprises.

A 7 oz. cup of espresso averages between 70 and 100 mg of caffeine. Some of the stronger energy drinks average 120 mg. One tested in the study topped the charts

at 141 mg, or more than double the recommended amount! That's even more than No-Doz. No wonder you couldn't sleep.

On the better news side, all the standard cola drinks, such as Coke and Pepsi, came in under 48 mg for a 12 oz drink, well under the safety limit. Some diet drinks seem to replace the energy boost from the missing sugar with caffeine, so you'll still get your rush, just not from calories. And don't think that the yellow sodas are safe. Some of them have more caffeine than the standard colas.

When it comes to coffee and tea, there's a lot of variation depending on how it's prepared. Coffee made in a drip machine can have as little as 115 or as much as 175 mg in a 7 oz cup. Percolated coffee tends to be higher. Tea is much lower, usually under 70 mg per cup. However the actual chemical in tea is a variant of caffeine. It's absorbed more slowly, so has more of a calming rather than energizing effect. Even yerba mate, the South American drink known for its caffeine, rarely has over 30 mg in a cup of brew.

Chocolates are also blamed for, or avoided for, their caffeine content. But an ounce of dark chocolate, the strongest form, has only about 35 mg. Some coffee-flavored yogurts have more than that. The makers probably wanted to be sure you were aware it had 'real coffee' in the carton.

For most of us, it doesn't matter how much caffeine is inside the can. If we get too strong a drink one time, we avoid that brand later. But for people with psychiatric conditions, gastrointestinal disorders, heart ailments, or even pregnant women, avoiding or limiting caffeine is definitely in their best interest. Whether caffeine can harm an infant or unborn baby is still under discussion, but high use of caffeine is linked to low birth weight babies. And who wants a child to be more hyper-active than they naturally

are?

Here's a recipe that's low in fat, nice and chocolate-y without enough caffeine to ruffle anyone's nerves. You can substitute peanuts or pecans for the walnuts if you prefer. Baked in the larger pan, this is more like a brownie, in the smaller pan more like a simple cake. Either way, it's delicious. Enjoy!

Chocolate Orange-sauce Bars

3/4 C sugar

1/4 C oil

1 1/4 C all-purpose flour

3/4 C unsweetened applesauce

1/4 C baking cocoa

2 egg whites (or egg substitute)

1 tsp baking soda

2 tsp grated orange rind

1/3 C chopped walnuts

Coat a 9x9 or 8x8 inch baking pan with non-stick spray. Preheat oven to 350° F. In one medium bowl, combine sugar, flour, cocoa and baking soda. In second bowl combine oil, applesauce, egg whites and orange rind. Beat at medium speed for 2 minutes. Add dry ingredients and mix just to combine. Spread in pan. Sprinkle with nuts. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until tests done in center. Cool in pan.

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