

Keep Your Game!

Do You Really Need an Energy Drink?

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From the high school football championship to the half marathon or the hoops grudge match with your coworkers, you or your kids took their “A” game.

So now what? Energy depleted, thirsty and hungry, how do you refuel and recharge? What do you reach for? If you or the kids are grabbing an energy drink to recharge, you might both be getting a short term fix that creates a long term problem.



Regular calorie energy drinks are not only loaded with sugar, but caffeine. That's bad enough for adults, but what about kids? To quote the American Academy of Pediatrics – “Rigorous review and analysis of the literature reveal that caffeine and other stimulant substances contained in energy drinks have no place in the diet of children and adolescents.”

There are several problems with energy drinks including how they “fix” the problem of being tired, the ingredients they contain, the extra sugar included, and their potential for abuse.

It's a fact – adults need from 7-9 hours of sleep (adolescents and teens need between 8 – 10 hours). If you have a body that needs 8 hours and you are only getting 7, you will be tired. Some extra caffeine might make up for a short night here or there, but there is no replacement for sleep. Caffeine in coffee or tea is generally safe in reasonable amounts, but energy drinks often far exceed these and even add other stimulants like guarana and taurine. Unfortunately, there is little data on safe levels of caffeine consumption in kids. In addition, good studies on the safety of guarana or taurine supplements in kids or adults are lacking.

How about the calories from the sugar in many energy drinks? The liquid calories kids consume account for about half of the childhood obesity epidemic. Pair that 16 oz. regular energy drink with a 2 oz. energy bar, and you'll really need to put your sneakers back on. The added calories will require a 5 mile walk or about 50 minutes of vigorous exercise to burn off. Recharging with water and fruits and veggies is always a better choice.

Then there's the potential for abuse. A recent trend to combine these drinks with alcohol increases the chances of alcohol overdose. Alcohol alone is a sedative but the stimulants in energy drinks can blunt the sedative effect leading to even more alcohol consumption -- increasing the chances of consuming a dangerous amount.

Additionally, there is evidence that the combination of sugar and caffeine is addictive, with one substance increasing the craving for the other. If kids get started on these drinks early on, they may be hooked for life.

For kids, the answer is to avoid energy drinks altogether and cut back on the sugary snacks. Not bad advice for adults either. **For more information about making your whole family healthier, visit Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln at HealthyLincoln.org/Initiatives. Click on “Beverage Facts.”**

Dr. Bob Rauner is the Director of **Partnership for A Healthy Lincoln**, a local nonprofit dedicated to improving community health, wellness, and fitness. Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln works to improve wellness policies, conduct health research, and collaborate with community partners to promote healthy nutrition, increase fitness, and decrease obesity-related chronic diseases in our city and county. For more information visit www.healthylincoln.org

Don't Waste Your Workout!

You'll need lots of energy to burn off the calories from this snack.*

* 200 calorie drink, 200 calorie energy bar, 150 lb. person

Walk **5 miles**
or 10,000 steps

OR

Exercise **50 minutes**
vigorous cardio

OR

Bike **10 miles**
pedaling fast

If you recharge with water and fruit or veggies instead, you could save over 100,000 calories per year.

HealthyLincoln.org

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