



SAFE USE OF ENERGY DRINKS

The Issue

Excessive drinking of “energy drinks” or mixing them with alcohol can have serious health effects.

Background

There are many “energy drink” products currently sold in Canada. They are available in corner stores, gas stations and bars, usually displayed alongside soft drinks, juices and sports drinks. Some of the brand names include:

- Red Bull Energy Drink
- Impulse Energy Drink
- Dark Dog
- Shark Energy Drink
- Hype Energy Drink
- SoBe Adrenaline Rush
- EAS Piranha Energy Drink
- AMO Energy Drink
- Red Rain
- Red Dragon Energy Drink
- Diablo Energy Drink
- YJ Stinger

Other brands may be available.

“Energy drinks” are meant to supply mental and physical stimulation for a short period of time. They usually contain caffeine, taurine (an amino acid, one of the building blocks of protein) and glucuronolactone, a carbohydrate.

“Energy drinks” should not be confused with sports drinks such as Gatorade or Powerade, which re-hydrate the body. These sports drinks also provide sugars, which the body burns to create energy and replenish electrolytes. Electrolytes maintain salt and potassium balances in the body.

The problems with “energy drinks” arise when too many are consumed or when they are mixed with alcohol. For example, they have become popular at all-night dance parties, bars and clubs.

People drink them to keep up their energy during periods of intense physical activity or drink them after exercise to quench their thirst. But rather than re-hydrating their bodies, these drinks may actually lead to dehydration.

Because of the effects they have, some “energy drinks” may have to be regulated as natural health products under the Natural Health Product (NHP) Regulations, depending on their ingredients (such as caffeine and vitamins), and the claims they make. Under the regulations, natural health products have to undergo a review process for their quality and safety. They also have to display recommended conditions for use, as well as cautions.

Currently, only Red Bull Energy Drink is authorized for sale as a natural health product and bears a natural health product number (NPN). The safety of other “energy drinks” (including those listed above) have not yet been evaluated under the NHP Regulations.



Four reports of adverse reactions involving “energy drinks” similar to Red Bull Energy Drink, have been reported to Health Canada.

Health Risks of Energy Drinks

In the four reports of adverse reactions involving “energy drinks,” symptoms included:

- Electrolyte disturbances
- Nausea and vomiting
- Heart irregularities.

These four incidents involved improper use of “energy drinks,” such as drinking them with alcohol or in greater quantities than recommended.

Because of the nature of the adverse reaction reports, it is not possible to tell if the symptoms reported were due to the effect of combining the “energy drink” with alcohol, or due to alcohol itself.

Minimizing Your Risk

If you drink “energy drinks,” be aware of the following.

- Red Bull Energy Drink is considered a health product in Canada and should be used according to the label instructions.
- Do not drink excessive amounts of Red Bull Energy Drink. The limit on Red Bull Energy Drink is 500 mL or two cans a day, as indicated on the product label.
- Do not mix Red Bull Energy Drink with alcohol.

- If you engage in intense physical activity or exercise, drink enough water to help re-hydrate your system.
- The safety profiles of other similar “energy drinks” have not been evaluated by Health Canada. It is not wise to drink excessive amounts of any “energy drink” or to mix them with alcohol.
- If you have an adverse reaction to an “energy drink”, report it as outlined in the Need More Info? section.

Health Canada's Role

Due to the reported adverse reactions, as well as the media attention surrounding the safety of Red Bull Energy Drink and similar products, Health Canada is monitoring their use and will take appropriate measures to ensure the health and safety of Canadians. This may include regulating other “energy drinks” under the Natural Health Products regulations.

Need More Info?

To report an adverse reaction, please contact the Canadian Adverse Drug Reaction Monitoring Program (CADRMP) of Health Canada:

CADRMP
Marketed Health Products
Directorate
Health Protection Building,
Tunney's Pasture, AL 0701C
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9
Email: cadrmpp@hc-sc.gc.ca
Tel: 866 234-2345
Fax: 866 678-6789

Your call will be directed to the appropriate Regional Centre.

Or visit our Web site at:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/tpd-dpt/index_adverse_e.html

For additional articles, go to the It's Your Health Web site at:
<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/vsv>
You can also call (613) 957-2991