



## Energy Drinks are NOT Sports Drinks!

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Whether you need extra energy to make it through the day, a competitive edge on your opponent, or are just tempted to try something new...the concept of an "energy" drink is very alluring. However there are many things athletes need to know about energy drinks. Remember...energy drinks ARE NOT sports drinks!

Other than water, most of the products marketed as energy drinks contain carbohydrate and caffeine as their principle ingredient, and are often supplemented with herbs (2). **Carbohydrates** are a necessary source of energy for the athlete's diet.

Lee Ann Di, Sports Nutritionist at Summa Wellness Institute notes "In sports drinks the carbohydrate source is a combination of types for absorption which is helpful during events and pre/post event." Most of the beverages sold as energy drinks contain too many carbohydrates to be used as a sports drink and may cause gastrointestinal disturbances.

Dr. Nilesh Shah, Medical Director for Summa Center for Sports Health also reminds us that "Most of the carbohydrates in these beverages come from sugar which is the least desirable form of carbohydrate." This may actually impair versus improve performance.

DiBiase states "All energy drinks do is raise insulin levels (not helpful if looking for weight loss)."

Drinks containing **caffeine** as a principle ingredient have a stimulatory affect, and have been found to increase blood pressure (1,4,5,7,8). This raises a safety concern for athletes. This increase in blood pressure may place an increased strain on an athlete's heart. Also keep in mind that athletes should also restrain from stimulant drinks, or at the very least inform their medical provider about their recent consumption of these drinks for an appropriate interpretation of their blood pressure readings (6).

In the United States, **herbs** are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as considered dietary supplements and are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is up to the individual manufacturer to prove safety of their product. The herbs in many of these energy drinks are not required to be standardized. Athletes should be wary of ingesting herbs with unproven ingredients that have unproven effects on health and performance, and may cause harmful side effects (3).

### Be skeptical consumers and ask questions before buying:

- Label reading is necessary!
- Athletes using medications should avoid any product that contains herbs.
- If there is no Nutrition Facts or Supplement Facts panel, athletes should not buy the product.
- Athletes should examine the Nutrition Facts panel for the total carbohydrate content as well as calories.
- Avoid the product if the evidence for claims is non-existent, incomplete, or unsubstantiated!
- If it sounds too good to be true, chances are that it probably is! (2)

Athletes must be alert that energy drinks are not appropriate sources for energy or hydration. There is no substitute for good hydration, proper nutrition, rest, training, and recovery. All of these components are necessary to help the athlete feel and be energized!

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