

The **ALERT** Educator

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Ultra! Mega! Max!

by Isabel Burk

These qualifiers beckon to teens looking for more energy, more power, and more hours in the day. The quest for "up" was jumpstarted by Starbucks and other branded coffee shops, and quickly adopted by youth. Seeking a lift has now become teens' quest, played out 24/7 in person and online, through school, work, games, sports and relationships.

Coffee has long been the wake-up drink of many adults, but some high school cafeterias sell coffee in the morning to jump start both students and staff. Coffee shops on every corner offer endless combinations with caffeine as the active ingredient. The coffee house has become a prime

afterschool, after the movies stop, where teens order grande mocha skim lattes with sophistication as they chat on their cell phones. The fancy hot and cold coffee drinks contain many more calories (mostly from sugar and fat) than a single cup of brewed coffee, which contains zero fat and only a couple of calories.



Full Throttle

Coffee beverages are not the only possibility for boosting energy. Increasingly, teens choose energy or sports drinks won over by the abundance of choices available and the relentless marketing tailored specifically to them. Red Bull, introduced into the U.S. in 1997, led a wave of energy drinks. Energy and sports drinks are a \$4.9 billion market, with 500 new energy drink products introduced worldwide in 2006! One third of teens consume an energy drink (not including coffee) at least once a week; two thirds of young adults consume an energy drink at least once a week. (Simmons Market Research Bureau, 2005; *Beverage Digest*, 2007)

Caffeine is among several stimulant ingredients that punch up these drinks. The list of stimulant ingredients includes guarana, maté, kola nut, bitter orange (*citrus aurantium*), green tea extract, and others. Combining stimulant ingredients potentiates their effects, that is, makes the effects more powerful than each might be individually.

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7-Eleven serves "Full Throttle Frozen Fury" a Slurpee flavor made with Full Throttle Energy Drink. The 144 mg of caffeine per 16 oz serving compares to brewed coffee, but unlike coffee, 7-Eleven cups range up to 44 ounces. That's a lot of stimulant and sugar served as a hot weather treat.

Caffeine

What's the short-term reward? Increased energy, endurance, and stamina; decreased appetite; faster metabolism, sharper concentration; reduced fatigue and ability to stay awake longer.

But caffeine and other stimulant ingredients produce a range of physiological effects that are more pronounced in smaller, younger bodies. These include an increase in blood pressure, increase in heart rate, increase in respiration rate, faster metabolism, increase in body temperature, and possibly heart palpitations.

Caffeine overdose can be serious. In 2005, US Poison Control Centers reported more than 4500 calls to their experts for caffeine-related emergencies; half of these incidents related to individuals younger than age 19. Many incidents resulted in hospitalization or medical treatment. Symptoms of caffeine overdose include muscle twitching, confusion, moving in and out of consciousness, fever, breathing trouble, vomiting, diarrhea, chest pains, irregular heartbeat, rapid heart beat, hallucinations and/or convulsions.

What symptoms indicate an overdose? Racing heart, no appetite, nausea/upset stomach, severe anxiety and/or confusion, increased thirst, hallucinations, fever, breathing trouble, dizziness, agitation. These symptoms shouldn't be ignored, particularly in youth.

Youth looking for a strong buzz bypass beverages and take caffeine/energy pills, caffeinated mints, gums, or powders to get the concentrated dose quickly into their system.

Ingesting stimulant ingredients can result in dependency. Users expect the stimulant effects, and seek them. Refraining from stimulants can result in withdrawal symptoms such as headache,

nausea, dizziness, fatigue, jittery nerves. Over a period of time, as their bodies build tolerance to a certain level of stimulants, users increase consumption to achieve the desired effects. This leads to a recurring cycle of stimulation (from the caffeine and sugar), crash and withdrawal. This cycle keeps users craving the lift, reluctant to give up coffee, energy drinks or other sources of stimulant ingredients.

Athletes, gym regulars, and sports lovers should know that ingesting caffeine produces a diuretic effect, and some people get dehydrated when consuming these drinks or



utilizing any stimulant product. It's important to note this risk, particularly when working or playing hard, or in hot weather.

The Food and Drug Administration recommends that adult daily intake of caffeine be kept to about 300 mg, but there is no authoritative estimate on safe levels for youth.

A glance at the caffeine content in everyday foods shows how easy it is to exceed 300 mg without really trying. (Visit: www.cspinet.org/new/cafchart.htm) In the long term, regular consumption of stimulant ingredients in any form (coffee, soft drinks, energy/sports drinks, diet aids,) can result in chronic insomnia, disturbed sleep patterns, anxiety, and hypertension.

Surf over to www.monsterenergy.com to see the strong appeal to "extreme" sports lovers, particularly with its newest product, Monster M-80 Energy Juice. Monster also sponsors musical events such as "Ozzfest" all over the country, drawing in teens who want to meet bands before they become famous. Fans drink these bands' choice of beverage, seeing their selection as a celebrity endorsement. Younger fans may not realize the financial reasons musicians seek product support.

Extreme



Marketing to Youth

Every grocery store, convenience store, food and beverage outlet features multiple brands of energy drinks, often right at the checkout counter for grab'n'go ease.

Companies promote these drinks creatively, using celebrity endorsements, event sponsorship, splashy logos, websites, Internet ads, sponsorships and colorful packaging. Drinks are marketed to specific audiences, including the sports-minded (such as skiers, skateboarders, bicycle riders, soccer players, and wannabe athletes) to hip hop enthusiasts, music lovers, video gamers, and to drug users.



Teens browse product websites and engage in the games and interactive opportunities found there, and they visit often to see what's new. The SoBe Adrenaline Rush website www.sobeadrenalinerush.com beckons consumers to select their "lifestyle" from these choices: 9 to 5, music, lounge lizard, outdoors. Links to interesting places and events are provided, sorted by "lifestyle."

Lifestyle

Many energy drinks have their own MySpace and/or Facebook entries in addition to the product website. People are encouraged to link to these social networking sites, to become a "friend" of the product, then to get their friends to link also. In just a few weeks, the number of "friends" can increase dramatically.



Other product websites feature games, homemade videos, comic webisodes and other engaging content. Online/offline lifestyles merge at these sites, and youth eagerly join the forums to exchange comments and ideas.

Gamers expect to see real products featured in video and computer games. Since teens play video and computer games an average of 10 hours a week (*Business Week*, 12/24/07), energy/sports drinks compete to sponsor games and pay for product placement in them, advertising on their websites and offering collectibles and giveaways.

Have you heard of Blow?



It's an energy product marketed and sold solely online. This white powder Energy Drink Mix comes in a vial, along with a mirror and a fake credit card, and contains 240 mg of caffeine, plus kola nut. Just play with the powder, and mix into water to drink. The name and paraphernalia call to mind slang for cocaine and a well known method of preparing to snort the powder. This kind of product is discussed often in chat rooms and online social sites, and new customers are initiated without any advertising dollars being spent.

Alcoholic Energy Drinks

Since the 1997 debut of Red Bull in the U.S., mixing energy drinks and alcohol has become very common. People think this mixture prevents intoxication, but researchers have discovered that the combination deceives the individual into feeling more awake, not realizing their impairment. Energy drinks are often mixed with vodka or other liquor, by individuals or by bartenders.

American brewers jumped on this trend by introducing canned alcoholic energy drinks, using established energy drink brands.

Sparks, Tilt, and Bud Extra are examples. The packaging is so similar to the original energy drink that it takes a sharp eye to tell them apart. Rockstar, a popular energy drink, added alcohol to their beverage and calls it Rockstar 21. The highly flavored energy drink masks the alcohol taste, making it more palatable for younger teens to consume.

This combination of alcohol (depressant drug) and caffeine (stimulant drug) can result in physiological confusion: erratic heartbeat, stress on the cardiovascular system. In addition, the stimulant ingredients may prevent the individual from realizing the true level of intoxication, and he/she might undertake an inappropriate activity, such as driving, swimming, operating machinery.



Labels

By law, ingredients must be listed on the label of any food product or supplement, except for those prepared commercially at a store or restaurant, such as a cup of coffee or juice cooler. People who purchase an energy drink or similar product can check to see what stimulants are included, if they know what to look for. But that's not the whole story. Labels aren't required to show the dose of stimulants, so consumers can't really know how much they're ingesting. Stimulant ingredients to look for on the label: caffeine, guarana, maté, kola nut, bitter orange (citrus aurantium), green tea extract.

To quickly learn if a product is an energy drink or an alcoholic beverage, look at the label. If it says "Nutrition Facts" or "Supplement Facts" it is an energy drink. If the can or bottle doesn't have either of these, it's an alcoholic beverage. In school or at home, check immediately to see which one your teen is drinking.





Strategies for Preventing Abuse of Energy Drinks

Today's teen has a crowded schedule which begins at dawn and continues long into the night for work, studies or fun. They tell each other about energizing products to stay awake and alert far longer than normal, not understanding the possible consequences. Project ALERT can help you tune students in to information, skills and behaviors that can keep them safe and healthy.

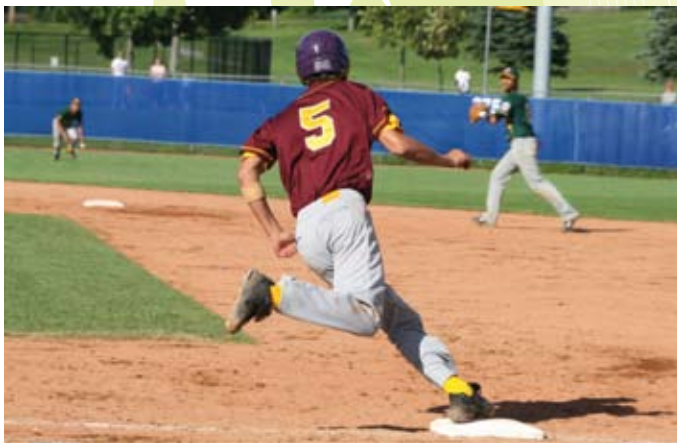
If you have time to plan and teach an additional lesson that focuses on energy drinks, think about using teaching strategies and activities that align with Project ALERT.

Highlight immediate, short-term consequences of use. Make use of Reasons Lists: *Reasons Why People Consume Energy Drinks* and *Reasons Not to Consume Energy Drinks*. Remind students that many of the reasons not to consume (dizziness, nausea, headache, thumping heart, insomnia) are feedback from your body, telling you it's overloaded. Then discuss how to avoid overload: moderation, avoiding combinations of caffeinated products. Pick out the nutritional reasons listed by students to focus on sugar content and its effect on teeth and weight.

If applicable, note that your school has removed soft drinks from its vending machines and cafeterias to protect student health. Discuss some of the reasons for this decision.

The high visibility and aggressive marketing of energy drinks and coffee concoctions mean that you can successfully use many of the discussion techniques from Lesson 4, Introduction to Pressures. For example, use of the Advertisement Count Sheet, the Identify Ad Measures activity, and the Rewrite Ad Messages process would all work well.

Use the Project ALERT role play technique to help youth anticipate and practice ways to refuse energy products. What common situations might your students face? Sports/team practice or



events; parties or gatherings; sleepovers; study sessions; finals week; afterschool coffee shop stops. Remind students that the pressure may be external or internal. Create several scenarios, use Poster 9 to assist their discussions, and ask students to brainstorm and perform skits. Praise and reinforce their solutions.

A new student handout: *What Teenagers Want to Know About Energy Products* can be downloaded from the Project ALERT website, www.projectalert.com. This handout can be used to create a home learning activity or to organize classroom discussion around key topics.

How can you tell what's in the drink (product)?

How can you energize yourself without soft drinks, coffee, etc.?

Are energy products harmless?

What can you do if you've noticed a friend's increased consumption of energy drinks/coffee products?

What do you tell your younger sister/brother about coffee or other energy products?

You can play the Benefits Game with caffeine and other stimulant ingredients. Some of the Benefits of Not Using Caffeine include being in control; physically fit; better heart health; making your own decisions; free from dependence on substances; sticking to your values; better, deeper sleep.

Ask for examples of people who have stopped drinking coffee or energy drinks ("I know someone who...") and how their bodies reacted.

After the Benefits List has been completed, emphasize the benefits of remaining aware of your body's functioning and supporting optimum health through good nutrition, sleep and physical exercise. Remind students that caffeine and energy drinks often led to dependence, which takes away your control.

Wrap up by noting how common it is for a person to graze, to start the day with coffee, drink a soft drink, eat chocolate, drink an energy drink, have a latte ...it all adds up to lots of stimulants and sugar, and a stressful cycle for the heart and body.

Suggest that cutting back on caffeine is one of the life changes that many people consider.

Remind teens that they have shown good sense, insight, and top-notch skills in Project ALERT, and what they have learned can help them throughout their lifetime with a variety of lifestyle choices. ♦

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Project ALERT trainer Isabel Burk is a nationally known expert on health, prevention and education issues. She provides technical assistance, program consultation and training to schools and organizations across the country. She specializes in issues related to school drug policy, inhalant abuse and OTC/Herbal/Supplement issues.

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Study Shows Self-Reports of Drug Use Mostly Accurate

Researchers who compared self-reports of tobacco and other drug use with urine and hair samples found that most users accurately reported their own consumption.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) report, "Comparing Drug Testing and Self-Report of Drug Use Among Youths and Young Adults in the General Population," found that self-reports and urine tests for past-30-days smoking were in agreement 84.6 percent of the time. For marijuana, the agreement rate was 89.8 percent.

Urine tests and self-reports of cocaine use in the past seven days were in agreement 98.5 percent of the time.

"This validity study concluded that biological drug tests can be used as objective markers of drug use to verify self-reports among youth and young adults," the researchers noted.

Sweeteners Increase Alcohol Effect

Artificial sweeteners increase the rate of alcohol absorption in the body, meaning that drinks mixed with diet soda may be more potent than sugary drinks.

Reuters reported May 23 that Australian researchers said that the sweeteners cause the stomach to empty faster, thus speeding alcohol into the bloodstream. They based their conclusions on experiments using ultrasound to track digestion among a group of male test subjects after they consumed vodka mixed with an orange sugar-sweetened drink, then later a drink sweetened with artificial ingredients.

Dr. Chris Rayner and colleagues at Royal Adelaide Hospital found that the subjects' stomachs emptied half of their contents in 15.3 minutes after the diet drink, compared to 21.1 minutes after consuming the sugar-sweetened drink. Peak blood-alcohol content also was higher after the men drank the artificially sweetened drink.

"People tend to consume more [drinks with diet mixers] because of the lower calorie content," said Rayner. "These drinks also tend to be consumed at times other than meal times, when food would slow gastric emptying." Rayner said that labels on artificially sweetened alcohol drinks should warn about the elevated risk of intoxication.

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The BEST Foundation for a Drug-Free Tomorrow is a nonprofit organization committed to providing schools and their community partners with the necessary information, materials and guidance to effectively implement Project ALERT, a skills-based substance abuse prevention curriculum for middle grade students.

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2007 Prevalence of Use Statistics

Young people are using drugs. And when students think everyone is doing it, using tobacco, marijuana, alcohol or inhalants...they may feel more pressure to use them too.

When students overestimate the number of their peers who are involved in drug use, they are less likely to perceive social support for refusing offers to use drugs. Actually, most youth don't use drugs.

As a Project ALERT teacher, you strive to make this point with your students in Lesson 4, Activity 3 - The Prevalence of Use Activity. To make your point with credibility, you need to be aware of current statistics.

The 2007 National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Monitoring the Future Study reports the following national usage patterns for eighth graders:

- 7.1% smoked cigarettes in the last month
- 5.7% used marijuana in the last month
- 15.9% used alcohol in the last month

Yes, the numbers are too high. But nationally, most young people don't use drugs!

The complete *Monitoring the Future Study* can be found at: www.monitoringthefuture.org