

Energy drinks and sports drinks

Although sports and caffeinated energy drinks are widely available and popular among Canadian children and youth, they can pose serious health risks. As a parent or caregiver, it's important that you discuss the risks of using these beverages with your child. Be a role model. If you make healthy drink choices, your children are more likely to make those choices too.

When it comes to staying hydrated, water is still the best choice for kids.

What are sports drinks and energy drinks?

Energy drinks are beverages that claim to boost energy, make you feel less tired and improve concentration. They usually contain ingredients like caffeine, sugar, taurine (an amino acid), herbs and vitamins.

Sports drinks are flavoured beverages that usually contain a mix of water, sugars and electrolytes (minerals) like salt, potassium and magnesium. They can help replenish electrolytes lost when you sweat a lot during intense activity.

Both can be unhealthy for your child and may play a role in obesity.

Are energy drinks safe for my child or teen?

Energy drinks are **not recommended** for children and teens because of the amount of caffeine, sugars and other ingredients (like herbs and amino acids) they contain.

Caffeine is a drug naturally found in the leaves and seeds of many plants. It's also artificially made and added to certain foods. Caffeine is in coffee, tea, chocolate, energy drinks, many soft drinks, and some medications. It can make you feel more awake and give you a temporary energy boost.

Energy drinks can have anywhere from 50 mg to more than 200 mg of caffeine per can. One energy drink could have more caffeine than the maximum safe daily limit for children and teens.

Energy drinks should never be used instead of water to rehydrate.

How much caffeine is safe for my child?

Ideally, children shouldn't have any caffeine. But because it's found in many common foods and beverages—like chocolate milk and other chocolate products – Health Canada has set these daily limits:

- 4 to 6 years old: no more than 45 mg per day (about one 355 ml can of pop)
- 7 to 9 years old: no more than 62.5 mg per day (about one and a half 355 ml cans of pop)
- 10 to 12 years old: no more than 85 mg per day (almost two 355 ml cans of pop)
- 13 years and older: no more than 2.5 mg per kilogram of body weight, per day

Can energy drinks cause side effects?

Yes. Children and teens are more at risk of side effects than adults because they tend to weigh less. This means they're exposed to more active ingredients – like caffeine—which can cause:

- fast heartbeat
- high blood pressure
- headaches
- impulsive behaviour
- anxiety
- irritability
- difficulty sleeping
- vomiting
- diarrhea

Children with certain physical or mental health conditions may be at higher risk of side effects from energy drinks. Caffeine can also affect how some medications work.

My teenager uses energy drinks. How can I keep them safe?

One of dangers of using energy drinks is when they are mixed with alcohol. Some people think that taking energy drinks can counteract the effects of alcohol, and keep you awake and alert. People who do this tend to drink even more alcohol, which leads to risky behaviours that can cause them harm.

Educate your teen about energy drinks with these messages:

- Mixing energy drinks with alcohol can be dangerous.
- Even taken alone, energy drinks can have serious side effects.
- Taking energy drinks on an empty stomach can make side effects worse.
- Energy drinks are not a meal replacement.

My child participates in a lot of sports. Don't they need a sports drink to rehydrate?

For most children and teens, water is the best way to stay hydrated before, during and after routine physical activity and play.

While sports drinks are designed to replace the fluid and electrolytes (minerals) lost in sweat and provide fuel for active muscles during sport, they are usually unnecessary for children taking part in routine or play-based physical activity. Since foods also contain electrolytes, eating a healthy snack and drinking water after exercise or play will help your child rehydrate better than water alone.

For young athletes competing in high intensity and/or prolonged events, see Nutrition for your young athlete.

**Also reviewed by Dietitians of Canada*

Additional resources

- Sports Nutrition: Facts on Sports Drinks (UnlockFood.ca)
(<https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Physical-Activity/Sports-Nutrition-Facts-on-Sports-Drinks.aspx>)
- Facts on Energy Drinks (UnlockFood.ca)
(<https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Caffeine/Facts-on-Energy-Drinks.aspx>)
- Caffeine in foods (Health Canada)
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-safety/food-additives/caffeine-foods.html>)

Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Nutrition and Gastroenterology Committee

Last updated: December 2022



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