Energy Drinks: What Parents and Caregivers Need to Know

There is a good chance your child or teen will be exposed to energy drinks. As a parent or caregiver, you play a key role in helping them make informed decisions. This resource will give you need-to-know information about energy drinks, so you are better prepared to talk with your child or teen.

What are energy drinks?

Energy drinks are beverages that have a lot of caffeine, sugar or sweeteners, and added flavours. Many also have extra ingredients like taurine, B vitamins, minerals, or herbs. Examples of energy drinks include Alani, Celsius, Monster, Red Bull, and Prime Energy.

Energy drinks often claim that they can increase alertness, energy levels, or improve physical performance. In Canada, they are not supposed to have more than 180 mg of caffeine in one serving, but some energy drinks on the market have more than this limit.

Herbal ingredients like guarana and yerba mate are natural sources of caffeine. Just because an ingredient is natural does not mean it is safe.

Why are energy drinks a concern for my child or teen?

Health Canada says that energy drinks should not be used by anyone under 14 years old, people who are pregnant or breastfeeding, or anyone who is sensitive to caffeine. Many energy drinks have more caffeine than Health Canada recommends for children and teens, which can be unsafe.

Young people may be more sensitive to caffeine. Watch for these common effects.

- 💗 Fast or fluttering heart
- 🤕 Headaches
- 💧 Dehydration, especially when active
- 😴 Trouble sleeping
- 😟 Anxiety or irritability
- 😣 Difficulty concentrating

Mixing energy drinks with alcohol can be dangerous. Caffeine in energy drinks can make you feel less intoxicated than you actually are. This can lead you to drink more alcohol than you normally would and increase the risk of unsafe or risky behaviours.

© Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH), 2026

How much caffeine is safe for my child?

The Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) says that ideally, children shouldn't have any caffeine at all. If consumed, Health Canada recommends:

- Ages 7–9: no more than 62 mg/day
- Ages 10–12: no more than 85 mg/day
- Ages 13-17: no more than 2.5 mg/kg
  (Example: for a person weighing 45 kg/100 lbs this means 113 mg of caffeine)

The amount of caffeine in one energy drink can be more than the daily limit for children and teens. If your child or teen is using energy drinks, talk with them about why they like them. You can suggest other drink options they might enjoy, like flavoured water, smoothies, or caffeine-free drinks. Support them to cut back over time, and encourage them to have energy drinks rarely, or not at all.

Did you know?

Small energy drinks (250 mL) contain about 80 mg of caffeine, while larger cans (473 mL) might contain over 150 mg.

Look at the label:
Energy drinks are required to have this label.



Be Aware of Product Labels: Foods and beverages with ingredients that could pose a health risk for those under the age of 14 are labelled with this warning label.

Learn more: [Supplemented foods: Labels - Canada.ca]

Caffeine isn't only found in energy drinks; it is also found in things like chocolate, cola, soft drinks, coffee, and tea. When thinking about daily limits, remember it all adds up over the day.

© Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH), 2026

Can you spot how these drinks are marketed?

Energy drinks are often marketed in ways that appeal to kids and teens. While Health Canada does not allow companies to advertise caffeinated energy drinks to children under 13, youth may still see and be influenced by this marketing.

Common marketing strategies include:

1. **Kid-friendly packaging** - Some energy drinks are packaged to look like popular snacks, candy, or drinks that kids like. This can make them seem harmless or fun.
2. **Social media and influencers** - Companies use social media posts and influencers to promote the drinks. Often, these posts do not look like ads, so kids (and adults) may not realize they are being marketed to. Hashtags, challenges, and sharing help these ads spread quickly.
3. **Youth-focused themes and characters** - Marketing may use language, images, cartoon characters, celebrities, or special deals that appeal to kids and teens.
4. **Sponsorships** - Brands may sponsor sports teams, youth events, or organizations. This can make the drinks seem 'cool', safe, or connected to healthy activities.

Talking to your child or teen



Create space for conversation. Find opportunities to chat openly when passing energy drinks in the store together or seeing commercials.

Approach the topic with curiosity rather than judgement. The goal is to help them make informed and confident choices. Advice like "don't drink it because it's bad for you" can backfire. Instead, focus on listening and keeping the conversation open.

Consider your child's viewpoint and ask open-ended questions such as: What do you like about energy drinks? What do you know about how they affect your health?

Find out why your child or teen may feel they need to drink energy drinks. Are they tired, stressed, or staying up late for homework? Are their peers drinking them? Do they need an energy boost for sports or extracurricular activities?

Boost energy without the “can”

Encourage your child or teen to:

- Get enough sleep each night
- Eat a variety of foods regularly
- Drink plenty of water or milk to stay hydrated
- Move their bodies daily



Role Modeling Matters: What you do and say makes a difference.
Be mindful of your own energy drink consumption.



Here is a child-friendly way to explain why energy drinks aren’t the best fix for feeling tired.

“Think of your body like a campfire. To keep it burning strong, you need wood—like regular meals and snacks—that burns slowly and gives steady energy. Energy drinks are more like tiny twigs: they burn fast, give a quick burst of energy, and then the fire burns out even faster than before.”

© Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH), 2026