



Want a quick pick-me-up? Eat an apple. Munch on a handful of nuts. But avoid energy drinks, because they can pack a truly dangerous punch. That was the clear message delivered in a recent **Health Canada** report on products such as Red Bull, Monster and Rockstar.

The report was **commissioned** by the federal government. It said that energy drinks are very popular. Canadians gulp down about seven million cans a month. Consumers are buying in to claims that the drinks increase energy levels and alertness. Yet the report says there's a serious health risk to using them – especially for young people.

### CAFFEINE'S KICK

Energy drinks, often sold at corner stores or gas stations, are a **potent** brew. They usually consist of lots of sugar, some herbs, vitamins and minerals.

However, their real kick comes from their extremely high caffeine content – the **stimulant** naturally found in coffee, tea and chocolate (and often added to cola soft drinks). And that's a problem, because too much caffeine can lead to disturbed sleep, headaches, stomach aches, heart problems and other serious health issues. In high doses, side effects such as vomiting and **convulsions** have occurred. Some studies show there is even a risk of death, especially when high caffeine levels are combined

with alcohol. The stimulant can also be addictive.

### DID YOU KNOW...?

A 28-gram milk-chocolate bar has about seven milligrams of caffeine. A cup of tea has 50 milligrams and a cup of coffee about 135 milligrams.

### HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Canadian guidelines say most adults can manage about 400 milligrams of caffeine a day. Children aged 10 to 12 can handle about 85 milligrams. Those between seven and nine can cope with about 62 milligrams, and those between four and six just 45 milligrams. Teenagers should have no more

### DEFINITIONS

**COMMISSIONED:** officially asked (and usually paid) for  
**CONVULSIONS:** violent uncontrollable muscle contractions  
**HEALTH CANADA:** the federal government department responsible for national public health

**POTENT:** having great power or effect  
**STIMULANT:** a drug or similar substance that temporarily increases physical or mental activity



than 2.5 milligrams for every kilogram of body weight.

Consider that a 355-millilitre can of Coke has about 36 milligrams of caffeine. By contrast, a typical 250-millilitre can of energy drink has about 80 milligrams. One brand available in Canada, Spike Shooter, has about 300 milligrams.

“Caffeine-loaded energy drinks have now crossed the line from beverages to drugs delivered as tasty syrups,” warned Noni MacDonald, a doctor who worked on the Health Canada report.

### THE NEW RULES

So, in October, the federal government announced that within two years, it will bring in a new law to force beverage companies to limit the amount of caffeine in energy drinks to 180 milligrams in a single-serving can – or about as much as is found in five cans of Pepsi.

As well, the government wants energy drink cans to include a full analysis of their contents. Producers will also have to ensure that the levels and types of vitamins and minerals are safe. And labels must plainly state that the drinks are not for children, shouldn't be combined

with alcohol and might cause death.

### THE CRITICS RESPOND

Justin Sherwood, who represents many energy drink producers, says the new rules are unfair. He argues that most energy drinks sold in Canada have less caffeine than a similar-sized cup of coffee. He believes the drinks should not be singled out as any more dangerous than other products with caffeine.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Energy drinks are not the same thing as sports drinks such as Gatorade or Powerade. Sports drinks usually contain just sugar, salt and water. They rehydrate the body and replenish the **electrolytes** you lose when you sweat.

But the authors of the Health Canada report said the new rules don't go far enough. For instance, the panel wanted the government to prevent beverage companies from using the term 'energy drink.' It's misleading. “Stimulant-drug containing drinks” is a more accurate term, they say.

The report also urged the government to make it illegal

for kids under 18 to buy energy drinks. As well, it said that the beverages should only be sold under the supervision of a pharmacist. And it wanted to limit the caffeine to 80 milligrams per serving.

### A PERSONAL CHOICE

Why didn't the government follow these recommendations? Some opposition members said officials didn't want to anger beverage-makers.

“Why won't the minister respect these expert guidelines to protect our children's health?” said NDP health critic Libby Davies. “Why is the minister siding with the industry?”

But the government said it wasn't taking sides. Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq stated that her aim was to find a middle ground between rules that were too strong and those that weren't strong enough. She also wants people to be able to choose what they want to consume.

“I firmly believe that it's up to individuals and parents to make their own decisions when it comes to what they eat and drink,” Ms. Aglukkaq stated. ★

### DEFINITIONS

**ELECTROLYTES:** solutions that conduct electricity. Having the proper amount and distribution of electrolytes in the body is necessary for good health.

# NATIONAL ENERGY DRINKS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. How many energy drinks do Canadians consume every month?

2. What claims do energy drink manufacturers make about their products?

3. What powerful stimulant is added to energy drinks to achieve these results?

4. What are Canada's caffeine consumption guidelines for adults?

5. What are Canada's caffeine consumption guidelines for children between 10 and 12 years old?

6. How much caffeine is in a typical 250-millilitre energy drink?

7. What was the main message of a recent Health Canada report regarding energy drinks?

8. List at least three new rules that the federal government plans to impose on energy drinks.

**TRUE OR FALSE?**

Mark each statement T (True) or F (False). If a statement is *false*, write the word or words that make it true on the lines below.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Canadians consume about seven thousand cans of energy drink every year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Caffeine is a stimulant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Tea has more caffeine than coffee, and coffee has more caffeine than most energy drinks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The federal government plans to limit the amount of caffeine in energy drinks to 80 milligrams per serving.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Children aged 10 to 12 can handle about 62 milligrams of caffeine per day.

**JUST TALK ABOUT IT**

1. a) For what reasons are you in favour of the government's new energy drink rules? For what reasons are you opposed to these rules?
- b) If you were Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq, how would you handle the issue of energy drink regulation? Explain.

**ONLINE**

Go to [www.news4youth.com](http://www.news4youth.com) and select the *What in the World?* tab to:

1. Vote in our monthly **poll**: The Canadian Beverage Association believes that the new federal regulations concerning energy drink sales in Canada are too harsh. Others believe they don't go far enough. How do you think the federal government should handle the sale of energy drinks in Canada?
- The federal government doesn't need to regulate energy drinks at all. / The federal government should bring in stricter rules regarding the sale of energy drinks. / The new energy drink regulations are fine as they are.*
2. Contact Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq to express your point-of-view on the new energy drink regulations (or visit <http://www.parl.gc.ca/MembersOfParliament/ProfileMP.aspx?Key=170884&Language=E>). ★