

Energy Drinks & the Heart: Know the Risks

According to some reports, up to half of children and young adults in the United States consume the beverages known as “energy drinks” or “energy shots,” which may contain three to five times the caffeine in a same-size can of soda. Even as their popularity has grown, energy drinks have come under scrutiny for possibly serious health effects, including heart rhythm problems, increased blood pressure, and—in rare cases—cardiac arrest.

A recent report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that **emergency room visits involving energy drinks doubled from 2007 to 2011 from about 10,000 to over 20,000**. These hospital visits resulted from use of energy drinks alone and from energy drinks in combination with pharmaceuticals (including, for example, Adderall and Ritalin), alcohol, or illicit drugs.

Medical researchers have more to learn about energy drinks, but the primary cause of serious health problems appears to be the high concentrations of caffeine. Examples of findings related to cardiovascular effects are –

- **Heart palpitations.** According to one study, 19 percent of college students who used energy drinks had experienced heart palpitations.
- **Increased heart rate and blood pressure.** Energy drinks can increase heart rate and blood pressure, particularly in people who already have heart disease.

The risks associated with energy drinks are believed to be higher for people who have existing medical conditions, such as heart defects or certain heart conditions. For example, people with **hypertrophic cardiomyopathy** should not have caffeine or other stimulants, as they may increase the risk of irregular heart rhythms, high blood pressure, and sudden death from cardiac arrest. It is important to note that not all heart defects are discovered before or when a child is born. Some people may have structural defects in the heart that go undiagnosed until later childhood or adulthood.

<http://www.scai.org/SecondsCount/Disease/detail.aspx?cid=135410fb-a293-43e0-82c6-ec0bcc47125f>

