



Indiana Prevention  
Resource Center

## ALCOHOL AND ENERGY DRINKS

Energy drinks contain caffeine as their primary ingredient, in addition to other stimulants such as guarana, which enhances the effect of caffeine. These drinks can contain alcohol and are frequently mixed with alcoholic beverages. A major concern with energy drinks is the way they are being marketed, primarily to youth and



in a similar manner to energy drinks containing alcohol. This can cause confusion among consumers, police, parents and retailers as to who is drinking what. Consumers of energy drinks who mix them with alcohol may falsely believe that they are less impaired due to the ingredients in energy drinks. This can lead to increased consumption of alcohol with the perception that activities such as driving are safer than they actually are.

### EFFECTS

High levels of caffeine can boost heart rate and blood pressure, causing palpitations, according to National Institute of Health. Mixing these drinks with alcohol further increases the risk of heart rhythm problems. Mixing alcohol and energy drinks can worsen the effects of dehydration on users. The FDA's review (2010) concluded that the combination of alcohol and caffeine is dangerous because it makes drinkers feel less intoxicated than they actually are. This disconnect makes people more likely to engage in drunk driving, unsafe sexual activity and other dangerous behaviors, according to the panel convened by the FDA.



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INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
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DEPARTMENT OF  
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School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation  
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The Indiana Prevention Resource Center is operated by the Department of Applied Health Science, School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at Indiana University. Funded, in part, by a contract with the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, financially supported through Health and Human Services/Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant.



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## INCIDENCE & PREVALENCE

According to SAMHSA's Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) 2009 estimates, trend data show a sharp increase in the number of emergency department (ED) visits involving energy drinks between 2005 (1,128 visits) and 2008 and 2009 (16,053 and 13,114 visits, respectively), representing about a tenfold increase between 2005 and 2009. Approximately half of the energy drink related ED visits (52 percent) made by patients aged 18 to 25 involved combinations of energy drinks with alcohol or other drugs.

**Selected Drug combinations in Energy Drink-Related Emergency Department (ED) Visits: Annual Averages, 2004 to 2009**

Drug combination	Number of ED Visits	Percentage of ED Visits*
<b>Total ED Visits</b>	<b>7,301</b>	<b>100</b>
Energy Drinks Only	4,059	56
Energy Drinks in Combination	3,242	44
Any Pharmaceutical Combination	1,986	27
Central Nervous System (CNS) Medications	1,158	16
CNS Stimulants	898	10
Pain Relievers	312	4
Narcotic Pain Relievers	107	1
Drugs That Treat Anxiety or Insomnia	143	2
Benzodiazepines	98	1
Any Alcohol Combination	1,174	16
Any Illicit Drug Combination	889	10
Marijuana	344	5
Cocaine	251	3

\* Because multiple drugs may be involved in each visit, estimates of visits by drug may add to more than the total number of visits, and percentages may add to more than 100 percent.

Source: 2004 to 2009 SAMHSA Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN).

## LAW & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In November 2010, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sent warning letters to four companies—Phusion Projects, Charge Beverages Corporation, New Century Brewing Company, United Brands Company Inc.—alerting them that the high level of caffeine in the alcoholic drinks amounted to an “unsafe food additive.” In 2010, leaders with the Indiana Association of Beverage Retailers announced a voluntary recall of alcoholic energy drinks at its nearly 1,000 member stores.

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