

HIGH-CAFFEINE ENERGY DRINKS

Caffeine-containing energy drinks usually contain a wide range of ingredients, with different brands having similar formulations.

One ingredient they all have in common is a form of sugar or glucose. Many also include a range of vitamins (especially B-group vitamins). Some have amino acids, while herbal supplements such as ginkgo biloba, echinacea and ginseng are present in a number. They often include guarana (a caffeine-containing extract from a South American plant).

What is the value of these ingredients?

Sugar is a source of energy and it has an appealing taste. It is rapidly digested and absorbed into the body, so the energy it provides is quickly made available for physical work. The inclusion of sugar is sound from the physiological point of view but the amount of sugar required could be contested.

B-group vitamins are used by the body to release energy from food, but a well-balanced diet provides adequate intake of these vitamins, so they are probably not an important component of these drinks.

The reasoning for providing amino acids (components of protein) is unclear. It is believed that some play a role in muscle contraction, especially in the heart. The typical Australian diet is relatively high in protein, so few people are likely to be protein deficient.

Herbal supplements are often claimed to have health benefits. There is little scientific evidence supporting most claims. High intakes of these supplements may be harmful, and some can interfere with the effectiveness of medicines.

Guarana is the main source of caffeine. Caffeine is a 'stimulant', for both physical and mental performance. A stimulant can be a 'double-edged sword'. While providing stimulation, excessive intakes of caffeine can have a harmful effect on physical performance and affect bodily functions such as blood pressure and heart rate.

Source: Nutrition Australia at
http://www.cubabev.com/web_articles/nutritionaustralia.org-FAQ%20on%20Caffeine%20and%20Energy%20Drinks.pdf

