

The Dangers of Caffeine for Children and Adolescents

Caffeinated beverages are growing in popularity among adolescents, and there are many new types that parents and caregivers might not be familiar with. Drinking caffeinated beverages can be harmful to kids' health and should be avoided.

What is a caffeinated beverage?

A caffeinated beverage is a drink that contains caffeine or other stimulants; common examples include coffee, tea, energy drinks, and energy shots.

Caffeine is a legal stimulant that is mildly addictive and is best known for its ability to boost energy and alertness. It has similar effects in kids and adults, but kids respond to much lower doses of caffeine.

Examples of other stimulants commonly used in energy drinks include guarana, taurine, ginseng, and L-carnitine. Many of these stimulants are added to energy drinks because they are thought to boost mood and increase your ability to focus.

Why should children and adolescents avoid caffeinated beverages?

While most adults can safely consume caffeine in limited quantities, children and adolescents have smaller bodies and rapidly developing brains, making them more susceptible to the negative effects of consuming too much. Evidence shows that consuming caffeine can lead to:

- **Poor sleep quality**, including delayed sleep onset, more sleep disturbances, and shorter sleep duration
- **Increased blood pressure**
- **Mental health issues**, including depressive moods, anxiety, stress, and self-harm
- **Higher added sugar consumption**

Even small amounts of caffeine (one cup of coffee) can have negative side effects. In addition, most caffeinated drinks popular with kids and teens also have large amounts of added sugars, non-sugar sweeteners, multiple stimulants (such as caffeine and taurine), and other additives. These ingredients are not recommended in isolation and are particularly cautioned against when combined.

Experts agree—beverages with caffeine are not recommended for children and adolescents.

What to know when making decisions about caffeinated beverages

There is limited data available on the total amount of caffeine children ages 5–18 are consuming each day. Caffeine content is not always shown on nutrition labels, making it difficult to know how much caffeine you are getting. However, research shows that soda and tea are leading sources of caffeine in children and adolescents, and energy drinks consumption is rising.

Always check the ingredients list when selecting any beverage, but especially if selecting a caffeinated beverage. Caffeine can add up quickly and is showing up in unexpected places—such as some seltzer waters, kombucha, and other “refresher” drinks.



Caffeine Content of Common Beverages

DECAF COFFEE OR TEA



2–15 mg
8–12 fl oz cup

BOTTLED ICED TEA



20–80 mg
16 fl oz bottle

REGULAR SODA



35–55 mg
12 fl oz can

BREWED BLACK OR GREEN TEA



55 mg
One tea bag

COFFEE



80–200 mg
8–12 fl oz cup

ENERGY SHOTS



200–250 mg
1.9 fl oz shot

ENERGY DRINKS



150–300 mg
12–16 fl oz can

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