**Study: Young people can benefit from more information about energy drinks**

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 For most students, the school year includes some late nights writing papers, studying for exams or socializing with friends. But popular energy drinks used by many teens and young people to stay awake might be setting the stage for potential adverse health effects, according to a study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Energy drinks are growing in popularity among young people with about half of the energy drink market consisting of adolescents and young adults, says Beth Olson, nutritional sciences specialist for the University of Wisconsin-Extension. “When used in excess, these drinks can cause health impacts such as elevated blood pressure, dehydration and difficulty sleeping,” she says.

Energy drinks that contain caffeine, sugars and other substances first made their appearance in the U.S. in 1997. Researchers from the CDC report that since their introduction, sales of the drinks have boomed. In 2011 alone, about half of all college students consumed energy drinks at least once a month, contributing to $9 billion in the drinks’ sales.

To learn more about teens’ perceptions of energy drinks, CDC researchers used data from a 2011 survey that looked at the health beliefs and behaviors of 779 young people between the ages of 12 and 17. The study, “Perceptions About Energy Drinks Are Associated with Energy Drink Intake Among US Youth,” (found online at <http://ajhpcontents.org/doi/abs/10.4278/ajhp.130820-QUAN-435>) measured energy drink consumption and the participants’ perceptions about energy drinks.

--Overall, eight percent of young people drank energy drinks weekly. Twenty percent wrongly perceived that energy drinks are safe for teens, and 13 percent wrongly perceived that energy drinks are a type of sports drink.

--Factors that went along with energy drink use among young people included alcohol use, increased physical activity, less fruit and vegetable consumption, and increased fast food consumption.

--Participants who believed that energy drinks were safe for teens were more likely to be male, drink alcohol, use marijuana and drink non-diet soda.

The study results suggest that youth who believe energy drinks are safe are more likely to participate in unhealthy behaviors—possibly due to a lack or awareness or education, peer influence or risk-taking behavior.

“Because of their potential harmful effects, it’s important for us to know how young people perceive the health risks of energy drinks,” says Olson. “This study’s findings suggest that young people may need more information to make healthier choices.”

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