



Harris County Hospital District

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MEDIA RELEASE

Think Twice About Energy Drinks

HOUSTON (Sept. 5, 2007) – You’re feeling a little sluggish, but you feel guilty skipping the gym. All you need is a little fuel for your workout, so you grab an energy drink. Sure, it will give you an extra boost, but drinking it before working out could lead to some negative health effects, say experts at the Harris County Hospital District.

Energy drinks are loaded with caffeine, sugar, vitamins and other natural stimulants that make you more alert, but they could also lead to dehydration, heart palpitations, muscle cramps and even an elevated body temperature and blood pressure because of yet another ingredient.

Many energy drinks contain about twice as much caffeine as other drinks. According to the National Beverage Association, an eight-ounce soft drink contains 20-30 mg of caffeine, compared to 80 mg in Red Bull and 144 mg in Full Throttle.

“Excessive caffeine can cause an increase in heart rate, diuresis (increase in urination), nausea, restlessness, anxiety and tremors,” said Dr. Larry Butcher, medical director of the hospital district’s Acres Home Health Center.

Caffeine is a diuretic, which causes the body to lose fluid. Add exercise and sweat, and it could lead to dehydration. Dehydration can be classified as mild, moderate or severe based on how much of the body’s fluid is lost or not replenished. When severe, dehydration can be life-threatening.

“Mild dehydration caused by exercising can be treated by drinking cool water,” Butcher said. “Sports drinks – not energy drinks – such as Gatorade can also be helpful. Anyone experiencing weakness, lightheadedness, nausea, dark urine or the inability to urinate should seek immediate treatment.”

With any activity that requires exertion, it’s healthier to drink water or non-caffeinated drinks to prevent dehydration. But, for those who insist on drinking several energy drinks while exercising, Butcher said they should increase their water intake to compensate for the fluid loss.

“But it’s better to limit their intake of energy drinks,” Butcher reiterated.

Another combination people should be careful with is mixing energy drinks and alcohol. Caffeine is a stimulant, while alcohol is a depressant. This combination can lead to severe dehydration, sleeplessness, and even cardiovascular conditions.

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most-populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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