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Caffeinated Energy Drinks – A Growing Problem

Since the introduction of Red Bull in Austria in 1987 and in the United States in 1997, the energy drink market has grown exponentially. Hundreds of different brands are now marketed, with caffeine content ranging from a modest 50 mg to an alarming 505 mg per can or bottle. In an article in the current issue of “*Drug and Alcohol Dependence*”, researchers report on the regulatory implications concerning labeling and advertising of caffeinated energy drinks, and the clinical implications for children and adolescents.

Roland R. Griffiths, Ph.D. and colleagues from the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, report that the regulation of energy drinks, including content labeling and health warnings differs dramatically across countries, with some of the most lax regulatory requirements in the U.S. In their article, the authors point out that the absence of regulatory oversight has resulted in a very aggressive marketing of energy drinks, targeted primarily toward young males, for psychoactive, performance-enhancing and stimulant drug effects. In their study, the authors report that there are increasing reports of caffeine intoxication from energy drinks, and as such, the likelihood that problems with caffeine dependence and withdrawal will also increase. These authors also point out that in children and adolescents who are not habitual caffeine users, vulnerability to caffeine intoxication may be markedly increased due to an absence of pharmacological tolerance. Genetic factors may also contribute to an individual’s vulnerability to caffeine related disorders including caffeine intoxication, dependence, and withdrawal. These authors also report that the combined use of caffeine and alcohol is increasing sharply, and other studies have suggested that such combined use may increase the rate of alcohol-related injury. Several studies suggest that energy drinks may serve as a gateway to other forms of drug dependence

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