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## AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

### Warn teens, preteens about mixing alcohol, caffeine

Energy drinks that contain caffeine are popular among students in college, high school and even middle school. But they can be dangerous if added to alcohol.



Alcohol is not good for children or young adults. It affects them differently than adults. This is one reason why the legal drinking age in the United States is 21 years. Energy drinks with caffeine and other stimulant ingredients also have no place in the diets of preteens and teens, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

When alcohol is mixed with caffeinated drinks or added to caffeinated colas, coffee or iced tea, teens and young adults are more likely to make bad choices or have bad effects. The energy from caffeine covers up the relaxing effects of alcohol. This makes underage drinkers feel less drunk, and they drink more, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Studies have shown that underage drinkers who combine alcohol with caffeine are more likely to binge drink, be involved in dating violence, drive under the influence of alcohol or be in a car with a drunk driver. Children with health issues like heart, kidney or liver disease; seizure disorders; diabetes; mood and behavioral disorders; or overactive thyroid and those who take certain medications may have more problems from energy drinks. These problems are made worse if alcohol is added.

Half of 13- to 15-year-old drinkers have admitted to trying alcohol mixed with caffeinated drinks, according to one report. The drinks also are popular among nearly 60% of college-age students who drink alcohol.

The AAP offers the following tips for parents:

- Talk with teens and preteens about why they should not drink alcohol. Children as young as 9 years old whose parents talk with them about drinking are more likely to have a healthy approach to alcohol.
- Discourage adolescents from drinking energy drinks.
- Tell children that no one should ever drink and drive. They should never ride in a car with a driver who has drunk alcohol. Set a “no questions asked” policy so that your child is not afraid to call you for help.
- Never let underage drinkers in your home or buy them alcohol. Be a good role model by using alcohol maturely, if at all.

Contact your pediatrician for advice and screening if you think your child has a problem with alcohol.

— Trisha Koriath

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