

Should kids have

CAFFEINE

Many kids love the sugary sweet taste of soda, sports drinks and energy drinks. And, many of these drinks also contain various amounts of caffeine. Is it okay for your child to consume these drinks?

No, says the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Because these drinks can actually be harmful, the AAP says children and teens should avoid them. Here's why:

- Caffeine can be harmful to a child's developing brain and heart, according to the AAP.
- Soda contains extra sugar and calories that can lead to weight gain and tooth decay.
- Energy drinks contain caffeine and other stimulants which can be harmful to children. Often, the caffeine content is not listed and can be higher than a cup of coffee.
- Water is a better option for kids playing sports. Sports drinks are usually not needed and often contain extra calories. Only children who exercise very hard for long periods may need a sports drink to replenish lost electrolytes, such as sodium and potassium.



The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) agrees. Caffeine can interfere with a child's sleep. The AND adds that caffeine can lead to a cycle of lack of sleep and consuming more caffeine to get through the day. If your child is low on energy, the AND recommends a short nap or getting to bed earlier at night.

HIDDEN CAFFEINE TRAPS

Wondering how much caffeine is in your child's drink? Unfortunately, you can't always tell by reading a label. Here are some general guidelines. (Caffeine shown in milligrams.)



Coffee, 12 fl oz,
coffee shop variety
Caffeine: 260



Energy drinks, 8 fl oz
Caffeine: 47-163



Espresso, 1 fl oz
Caffeine: 64



Candy, semi-sweet
chocolate, 1 oz*
Caffeine: 18



Hot chocolate, 12 fl oz,
coffee shop variety*
Caffeine: 20



Hot tea, 1 cup
Caffeine: 48



Cola, 12 fl oz
Caffeine: 48

Experts note that the caffeine content of energy drinks and coffee can vary widely. The safest option for children is to avoid caffeine completely.

**Chocolate and chocolate-containing foods are not a major source of caffeine.*

Source: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics