

# Kids high on energy drinks

## Dieticians warn of sleep deprivation, health risks

BY BRIDGET FITZGERALD

BORDER dietitian Kerryn O'Brien says caffeinated energy drinks should be banned for children because they damage the health of youngsters.

Her belief that the drinks have a negative effect on teenagers is supported by Wodonga Middle Years College principal Vern Hilditch.

Mr Hilditch says students who consume caffeinated energy drinks are sleep deprived and on edge.

"For some kids, breakfast is a packet of chips and two cans of Red Bull," Mr Hilditch said.

"When they get to class, these kids are a bit more on edge and over the top."

He says there is a trend for students to either bring these drinks from home or pick them up on the way to school.

The school was prompted to publish an article in its May newsletter warning against the consumption of energy drinks and the health risks associated with sleep deprivation.

Ms O'Brien says school-age children should stay clear of energy drinks.

"The caffeine speeds up the heart rate and the sugar tends to be glucose, which is quickly absorbed; the kids get too much of a sugar rush," she said.

"These drinks were created for marathon runners, so unless a child is doing more than an hour and a half of solid exercise then they really shouldn't be having them."

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Should caffeinated drinks be banned?

Dr Alana Hulme Chambers, from Gateway Community Health, says substituting an energy drink for breakfast will give kids a hit of sugar and caffeine but it will not sustain them for the rest of the day.

She says that while the long-term effects of these drinks are not yet known, the caffeine affects children more than adults because of their lower body weight.

In particular, caffeine might cause problems with concentration and disrupt sleeping patterns.

Mr Hilditch says the marketing push behind energy drinks has made them appealing to a younger audience.

"These kids watch the ads and associate these drinks with a cool macho-type image," he said.

Dr Hulme Chambers says children might try to emulate what they've seen in advertisements without understanding that they are being sold a product.

"There's evidence from the American Psychological Association that concluded children don't understand advertising until the age of eight," she said.

"For something that contains so much sugar, there should be a closer watch on advertising."

### YOUR SAY

**Q:**  
Do you drink caffeinated energy drinks?



JOE ROBINSON, 17

YES

When I'm tired, I have one pretty much every morning.



STEPH HANRAHAN, 17

YES

I drink it before netball, it makes me hyped up.



DYLAN POWLING, 13

YES

Sometimes at night if I want to stay awake.



TEAGAN GERECKE, 16

YES

Sometimes, I like the taste. They're very sweet.



TONII MELBOURNE, 13

NO

No, not really.



BLAIZE DOUBLEDAY, 14

NO

They're not good and taste disgusting.



JAMIE ROBERTS, 13

NO

I don't have them, they're not good for you but people think it's cool.