

# MyCardioAdvocate™

## Caffeine, Coffee & Energy Drinks

*When the molecule is the same but the vehicle makes all the difference*

*No 2026 guideline changes*

---

### Why This Matters

Caffeine is ubiquitous. Coffee, tea, energy drinks, and supplements all deliver this alkaloid. Yet the source matters profoundly. Coffee—consumed moderately (3-5 cups/day)—is generally cardioprotective, associated with lower all-cause and CV mortality. Energy drinks (5-Hour Energy, Monster, Red Bull, etc.) are a different beast. They contain high caffeine, taurine, guarana, and other stimulants in a compressed format and often in quantities exceeding safe thresholds. Energy drinks have been linked to QTc prolongation, arrhythmias, hypertensive episodes, and sudden cardiac events—especially in those with underlying QT prolongation or arrhythmia substrate. Dr. Riddock and Sachin Shah have published research on caffeine and cardiac safety; the message is clear: **coffee is safe; energy drinks demand caution.**

### Why Caffeine & Energy Drinks Fly Under the Radar

- **Reassurance about coffee:** Because coffee is safe, patients assume all caffeinated beverages are. This is false.
- **Energy drink regulation gaps:** Energy drinks are often sold as supplements, skirting regulatory oversight. Labeling of ingredients and total caffeine is inconsistent.
- **QT prolongation underappreciated:** QTc (corrected QT interval) prolongation from energy drinks can trigger torsades de pointes, especially in those with underlying long QT.
- **Youth vulnerability:** Adolescents and young adults consume energy drinks but are not routinely screened for arrhythmia substrate.
- **Acute vs. chronic risk blurred:** A single high-dose energy drink can trigger arrhythmias acutely; chronic use contributes to hypertension.

### MyCardioAdvocate™ Checklist: Caffeine & Energy Drinks

#### 1. Coffee Is Generally Safe

Moderate coffee consumption (3-5 cups/day) is associated with improved CV outcomes. You do not need to avoid coffee for CV reasons. If you have uncontrolled hypertension or arrhythmias, discuss moderation with your doctor.

#### 2. Avoid High-Dose Energy Drinks

Energy drinks (5-Hour Energy, Monster, Red Bull, etc.) contain high caffeine plus other stimulants. Avoid them, especially if you have a history of palpitations, syncope, or family history of sudden cardiac death.

#### 3. Know Your QTc

If you are a regular energy drink consumer, ask your doctor to review your EKG. Request your QTc interval; prolongation (>450 ms in men, >460 ms in women) is a risk factor for torsades. Energy drinks can prolong QTc.

### Key Takeaways

- Coffee (3-5 cups/day) is safe and associated with improved CV outcomes; no need to avoid it.
- Energy drinks are different: high caffeine, taurine, guarana, and other stimulants in concentrated doses.
- Energy drinks are linked to QTc prolongation, arrhythmias, and sudden cardiac events.

- Published research by Riddock and Shah confirms energy drink cardiovascular risk; avoidance is prudent.

## Next Steps & Related Content

- Enjoy coffee in moderation (3-5 cups/day) without CV guilt.
- Avoid high-dose energy drinks, especially if you have arrhythmia risk factors.
- If you use energy drinks regularly, request an EKG and QTc review.
- Review related briefs: **Arrhythmias & Palpitations, Long QT Syndrome, Sudden Cardiac Death Prevention.**

---

*Disclaimer: This brief is educational and does not replace professional medical advice. Always consult your healthcare provider regarding caffeine consumption, energy drink safety, and arrhythmia risk.*