



# Caffeine & Alcohol, A Risky Cocktail

*Substance Misuse Prevention Newsletter: A Collection of Readings*

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## Consequences of Use

**Impaired Judgement & Risk Taking:** Due to caffeine reducing the depressive effect of alcohol individuals are likely to drink more than usual resulting in impaired decision making and risky behaviors (CDC, 2020). Some of the behaviors secondary to impaired judgement might include drunk driving, unprotected sex, & physical altercations.

**Cardiovascular:** Both caffeine and alcohol can cause cardiovascular side effects. Together this combination can increase blood pressure (Mayo Clinic, 2021). This side effect is especially worrisome for those with underlying health conditions, which may be worsened by this type of drink (Mayo Clinic, 2021). Risks include stroke, an irregular heartbeat, and heart attack (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

**Weight Gain:** Alcoholic drinks are filled with calories and sugar which can lead to weight gain and contribute or exacerbate many chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hyperlipidemia (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

**Dehydration:** Both caffeine and alcohol are diuretics which can cause dehydration (Northpoint Recovery, n.d.).

**Anxiety:** Caffeine can cause physical symptoms that may trigger anxiety or exacerbate underlying anxiety (Northpoint Recovery, n.d.).

University Health and Counseling Services

## A Brief Overview

Mixing caffeine with alcohol has become a popular drinking trend amongst young adults. In 2017, 31.8% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 indicated that they drank a combination of alcohol and energy drinks at least once during the past year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). Additionally, those between the ages of 15 and 23 who combine energy drinks with alcohol are four times more likely to binge drink (CDC, 2020). Consequently, and due to many safety concerns, the FDA required seven types of caffeine infused alcoholic beverages to be appropriately modified in 2010 (CDC, 2020).

### Articles:

[CDC Fact Sheet](#)

[Why you Shouldn't Mix Energy Drinks and Alcohol](#)

[The Combined Effects of Alcohol, Caffeine and Expectancies on Subjective Experience, Impulsivity and Risk-Taking](#)

## What Makes Caffeinated Alcohol So Dangerous?

An individual might drink caffeinated alcoholic beverages thinking that this will allow them to stay up longer. Unfortunately, the caffeine can overpower the depressant effect of alcohol, which may increase one's energy, thus leading to an overconsumption of alcohol (CDC, 2020). Consequently, this may result in an increase in risky behaviors and possible injury (CDC, 2020). Essentially, the two substances are competing with one another, due to caffeine being a stimulant and alcohol being a depressant (Northpoint Recovery, n.d.). Furthermore, just like alcohol, caffeine is a drug, and can be addictive. There are many dangerous physical side-effects that are associated with caffeinated alcoholic beverages. See consequences of use for more information about associated risks.

## How to Reduce Risk

- Abstain or greatly reduce the number of caffeinated infused alcohol that you drink
- Always drink water while drinking, especially if indulging in caffeinated alcohol
- If unable to abstain from caffeine opt for a cup of tea that contains a lower amount of caffeine prior to drinking alcohol
- Be aware of your health history and how this impacts your risk of experiencing adverse outcomes

Educating yourself about the steps you can take to limit adverse outcomes can keep you and others around you safe

## THE DANGERS OF MIXING WITH ALCOHOL

CAFFEINE IS  
A STIMULANT  
while alcohol  
IS A DEPRESSANT  
a mix of both  
CAN RESULT IN  
SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS

- Dehydration
- Mineral loss
- Headaches
- Loss of strength
- Irregular kidney function
- Augmented binge drinking
- Violent behavior
- Alcohol dependence
- Heart arrhythmia
- Heart attacks

## Be Aware of Symptoms of Dehydration

Since both caffeine and alcohol are diuretics, they can cause symptoms of dehydration. This can become even more dangerous if someone begins to vomit due to alcohol related nausea and vomiting. Severe dehydration can be serious and at times even deadly.

Symptoms to watch for (Healthline, 2019; Mayo Clinic, 2020):

- Increased Thirst
- Dry Mouth
- Dark Urine
- Dizziness or feeling Lightheaded
- Confusion
- Lethargy or Fatigue

## Caffeinated Alcohol to Avoid

Rum and Cokes	Espresso Martinis
Red Bull and Vodka	Irish Coffee
Mudslide	White Russian
Kahlua	Any Energy Drink Combo

For comments on this newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact: Diane Geyer, LCPC, LADC, CCS, NCC~ Clinician and Coordinator of Clinical Substance Use Services at USM or Jillian Littlefield, RN and Graduate Assistant ~ Email: [diane.geyer@maine.edu](mailto:diane.geyer@maine.edu), [jillian.littlefield@maine.edu](mailto:jillian.littlefield@maine.edu)