



CAFFEINE CULTURE

The culture of caffeinated drinks around high schoolers -- why are students so dependant on caffeine?

story by **siena scornavacco**

Energy Drinks; Celsius, Yerba Mate, Redbull, Monster, Alani, Iced Coffee. Within a culture that runs on caffeine, these drinks have time and time again stuck out to teenagers, and have become a staple in the lives of many high schoolers. These caffeinated drinks provide a much needed energy boost that help combat demanding schedules and few hours of sleep.

Caffeine is a stimulant drug that has integrated itself into students' everyday lives, and has become a key ingredient in the countless drinks that are seen around the halls and classrooms of Fairview. But why have teenagers become so dependent on these drinks?

The normalization of coffee, tea, and energy has created a caffeine culture that has transformed high schoolers in the way they act, sleep and function. Being a stimulant, caffeine escalates movement and activity in one's brain. The drug stimulates the central nervous system, which in turn reduces the feeling of tiredness and increases alertness. Caffeine is also extremely fast acting, and can be fully absorbed into the body within 45 minutes of consumption.

Getting up before the sun every morning, and going to bed late into the night, due to extracurriculars, jobs, and homework, it's truly no wonder that high school students resort to caffeine as a tool to combat their tiredness and fatigue. With demanding schedules many teens have used this stimulant as a resource to get

through the day. "When I have a lot to do or feel unproductive, I'll drink something caffeinated," said Zach Nagle (11). This dependency on caffeine can prove to be detrimental to students' nervous system and cardiovascular health.

Expressing the desire to be productive, teenagers have put caffeinated drinks onto a pedestal, and have begun associating them with school, studying, and accomplishment.

"I ASSOCIATE CAFFEINE WITH SCHOOL AND STUDYING, SO HAVING SOME GETS ME IN THAT MINDSET"

Chris Payne (11)

"Caffeine just helps me get in the zone. I also think I drink it out of habit now. I associate caffeine with studying and school so having some gets me in that mindset," said Chis Payne (11). This unconscious link between productivity and the stimulant creates a dependency on these drinks.

Caffeine has been presented in many shapes and forms throughout the years, however most notably within high schools, caffeine has become ubiquitous in bright-colored energy drinks, catching the eyes of teenagers everywhere. "These energy drinks, they're so targeted to kids. They're bright colors, they're fruity flavors, even the

names appeal to teenagers," said Madeline Butler, Teen Choices and Life Management teacher at Fairview. Popular brands have specifically marketed their drinks towards teenagers, creating an entire market geared towards teenage caffeine consumption. Utilizing tools such as fruity flavors, fun names, bright colors and appealing packaging, these drinks become associated with productivity and enjoyment.

In large quantities, caffeine starts to affect mood and sleep. Due to the increased movement in the central nervous system, caffeine causes jitteriness and increased anxiety. "Now [students have] created a dependency on caffeine. Which, you know, similarly to other drugs that are stimulants, that is, in the long run, harmful for us. It can cause lots of sleep problems. It can cause lots of problems within our heart circulation and respiratory system," said Butler. While these drinks appear to be helpful when you first begin drinking them, they are not permanent solutions to fatigue or stress. "Even though caffeine made me kind of energetic, it was still affecting my overall mental energy, I was mentally exhausted," said Yun Joseph. While at first caffeine aids students, and grants the ability to stay up later, or reduce tiredness, constantly consuming caffeine creates addiction.

The addiction and withdrawal symptoms can be dangerous for the developing brains of teenagers. "I was addicted to caffeine, [I experienced] Headaches, nausea, I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep," said Gabby Scott (10). Flu-like symptoms are often produced with the withdrawal from caffeine. Feelings of brain fogginess, headaches, depressed mood and difficulty concentrating are often symptoms that come from this process. Especially among teenagers caffeine can stunt development.

"ITS NOT ACTUALLY FIXING THE PROBLEM ITS JUST PUTTING A BANDAID OVER IT"

Yun Joseph (11)

The human brain has neural connections or synapses that continue to develop until one's mid-twenties. Caffeine weakens these synapses and can even stop them from forming. "If you're in high school, you're 14 to 18, and your brain isn't even fully developed. You should not be consuming that much caffeine on a day-to-day basis," added Joseph.

Many students find themselves racing for coffee or an energy drink due to challenging classes and demanding schedules. Between sports, studying, jobs, extracurriculars and more, teenagers often put sleep at the bottom of their priority list. The most common denominator between high schoolers caffeine consumption is the amount of homework given to them. "I don't sleep well because I have a lot of schoolwork, I get stressed," said Scott. This lack of sleep tires students out, creating the need to drink caffeine daily. I think teens need to prioritize sleep. And unfortunately, with everything y'all have going on, that's what always gets pushed back," said Butler, agreeing with the fact that homework load heavily influences sleep schedules. In no way is caffeine a replacement for sleep, and while students reach for an energy drink after pulling an all nighter, the caffeine will end up having the opposite of the intended effect. "It's not actually fixing the problem. It's just like putting a bandaid over it," said Joseph. Getting the recommended amount of sleep is the biggest way that teenagers can stay mentally rested. Consuming healthy foods throughout the day will also help teenagers continue to have energy, without resorting to sugary, caffeinated drinks. Getting exercise is also extremely beneficial to one's brain and central nervous system. While large quantities of caffeine consumption can be detrimental to students' mental and physical health, in moderate amounts, caffeine can be

helpful. It allows one to treat tiredness, and allows students to persevere through the day. Drinking energy drinks occasionally, and solely when needed will not harm any teenager or student. It can be a helpful way to stay productive, make it through finals week, or have enough energy for an after-school practice. Coming in all shapes and sizes, some caffeinated drinks are more beneficial than others. Drinking tea is the healthiest way

to consume caffeine. Tea does not contain the added sugar that can be so prevalent in energy drinks and coffee. It utilizes the leaves that caffeine comes from, and guarantees enough energy without being harmful to one's body of mind. Black and green teas also contain a natural substance called Polyphenol, which releases antioxidants into the body, benefiting your overall health and protection against diseases.

While in moderate amounts caffeine can be used as a tool; it is in no way a substitute for sleep and healthy eating. It can cause addiction and withdrawal, and contribute to long term health issues, affecting anxiety and sleep schedules. The healthiest way to intake caffeine is through teas, which have low added sugars and where the caffeine source comes directly from the tea leaves. This unprocessed drink is the healthiest way of consuming caffeine. Getting the recommended amount of sleep is the biggest way that teenagers can stay mentally rested. Consuming healthy foods throughout the day will also help teenagers continue to have energy, without resorting to sugary, caffeinated drinks. Getting exercise daily is also extremely beneficial to one's brain and central nervous system. In moderate amounts caffeine can be used as a tool among high school students. However caffeine culture has put these drinks on a pedestal, and many teenagers

favorite caffeinated drinks

"Chai, it doesn't taste gross like coffee, but it helps me wake up in the morning."
Allie Johnson (10)



"Red Bull, no explanation needed."
Davis Lewandowski (12)

"Alani or Redbull - They're the only [drinks] with a good amount of caffeine and without a weird aftertaste."
Sonya Li (12)



"Yerba mates, they're not too sweet."
Lucy Hessling (10)

have become dependent on caffeine in order to stay awake throughout the day and manage a large homework load. In larger quantities these drinks can be dangerous towards brain development and can cause side effects. The addiction and withdrawal systems that are tied with caffeine are also unhealthy for teenagers. While energy drinks are helpful and delicious once in a while, they are in no way a substitute for a good sleep schedule or a healthy diet. While many students have a dependency on caffeine, there's many healthy ways of consuming it, and healthy tools that can be used to keep energy throughout the day. Caffeine culture among high schoolers can be complicated, but there are many ways to receive the benefits of caffeine without putting mental and physical health at risk.