

FINAL
EDITION

The
Herald **News**



Thursday, December 11, 2008

75 cents

FAMILY

The Herald News



HERALD NEWS FILE PHOTO

A high school student studies for her final exams in school. Studies show high school and college students often turn to stimulants, such as energy drinks, coffee and prescription drugs, to stay awake studying the night before a big test. Doctors say that's not a good idea.

Cramming for the exam

Experts urge students to avoid using stimulants

By Denise M. Baran-Unland
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD NEWS

Lewis University student Ryan Bulsin, 22, studies regularly and shuns caffeine during the school year. He doesn't even like the taste of coffee, he said.

The accounting graduate student's no-caffeine rule, however, goes out the window during final exam week. That's when Bulsin pulls all-nighters and consumes fair amounts of Cherry Pepsi, which he swears is a winning combination for him.

"I just sleep until it's time for the test," he said.

Bulsin's habits are mild compared to many college and high school students.

Liquid, pill boosts

In September, the anti-drugs advisory group Drug Education UK warned in *The Guardian* that students who use energy drinks not only were dependent on them, but had reduced levels of concentration. And it's not just a handful of students consuming them.

A 2007 survey of 500 college students revealed that 51 percent of them consumed at least one energy drink during the previous month, according to an Oc-

tober publication from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Of these, 29 percent reported "weekly crash and jolt episodes," and 19 percent said they experienced heart palpitations.

And when energy drinks don't do the trick for them, some students turn to prescription medications such as Ritalin to help them focus.

A 2001 survey showed that up to 25 percent of some college students are illegally taking prescription stimulants to help them study.

Risky drug use

A report published this week in the journal *Nature* cites a 2001 survey of about 11,000 American college students that found 4 percent admitted using prescription stimulants illegally in the prior year. But at some colleges, the figure was as high as 25 percent.

The stimulants Adderall and Ritalin are prescribed mainly for people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, but they can help other people focus their attention and handle information in their heads, the commentary in *Nature* says.

Such practices are not without significant health risks, warns family practitioner Dr. Ryan Tremb of the Channahon Healthcare Center of Morris Hospital.

"Taking stimulant medication if you don't have ADD is a bad

thing because it can cause paradoxical high blood pressure, nervousness and jitteriness," Tremb said. "Some of the energy drinks not only have caffeine in them — sometimes twice as much as the amount of caffeine — but herbs that have a caffeine-like effect on the body. When you put both of them together in large amounts they can also cause high blood pressure, restlessness and anxiety."

In addition to exciting the central nervous system, the diuretic effects of caffeine and stimulant medication may also lead to dehydration. If the dehydration is severe, an individual may experience irregular heartbeats and seizures.

Counterproductive

Realistically, Tremb knows that many students will consume energy drinks anyway. If you're older than 16 and are not pregnant or nursing a baby, then one drink a day, provided you keep yourself hydrated by drinking plenty of water, will probably not hurt you.

Unfortunately, he added, that's not how many students consume energy drinks. If they're lucky enough to escape the drink's side effects — along with the withdrawal that follows — they may find the practice to be simply counterproductive to their goal.

"What happens is that students

Training the mind to be brain smart

It is possible to optimize alertness without resorting to potentially dangerous means to do so said Arlington Heights acupuncturist Dr. Ian Wahl. He instead suggests the following natural ways to become "Brain Smart."

B: Brain food. "Broccoli is one of the foods that has shown to enhance cognitive function," Wahl said. Junk foods may be easy to obtain, but are devoid of nutrition and highly caloric. Be especially wary of simple carbohydrates (processed foods, cakes, pastries, etc.) and focus on complex carbohydrates (whole grains). Shun polyunsaturated oils (corn, safflower, etc.) that may be detrimental to brain cells, Wahl said.

R: Rest and relaxation. "We don't really promote that when it comes to college and we tend to forget how important they really are," Wahl said. He also recommends inhaling sage as an essential oil. "It's supposed to boost the brain power," he said. "I know people who swear by it and it can't hurt anybody."

A: Antioxidants. "Studies show that blueberries can help with short term memory," Wahl said. Zinc is also helpful; the best source is a handful of pumpkin seeds, he added.

I: Increase water intake. "Our brains are 95 percent water so when we get dehydrated we become sluggish, and forgetful," Wahl said. "Most people have a problem drinking six to eight glasses of water a day so I recommend that kids in college just carry a water bottle. With it, chances are they are going to drink."

N: Never drink diet sodas and watch sugar intake. Aspartame may disrupt memory, Wahl said.

BRAIN

From page E1

Supplements. Wahl's own supplements include Omega-3, flaxseed, Vitamin E, Vitamin C and Coenzyme Q10.

Multivitamins. "Studies show that school kids who took multivitamin and mineral supplements raised their IQ scores by huge points," Wahl said.

Avoid skipping meals. "Students laugh at me when I tell them this because they skip them all the time, especially if they have to go to class during the time when the lunchroom is open," Wahl said. He also recommends eating fruits and vegetables at every meal, even if it is only a glass of orange juice at breakfast.

Realizing priorities. "Focus on the thing that has to be done right now," Wahl said. "The most ur-

gent projects are the ones with the most immediate deadlines."

Tea, instead of coffee. Tea is full of antioxidants, Wahl said, and black and green teas have enough caffeine to boost alertness without the jittery side effects of coffee, colas and energy drinks. Avoid bottled tea and sweetened, herbal tea.

For more information visit www.chicagohealers.com.

— Compiled by Denise Baran-Unland

EXAM

From page E1

stay up all night drinking energy drinks and then they're not as alert on the test as they should be," Tremb said.

Energy drinks also are not a substitute for sports drinks, and they should not be mixed with alcohol either, a common practice on college campuses today, he added.

"People say that it allows you to drink more but you still have all the alcohol in you," Tremb said. "When you drink more, you're more prone to alcohol toxicity or alcohol poisoning."

Good study habits

Some students might object that without stimulants of some kind, all-night studying won't be possible. That's just the point, said Jim Kubalewski, director of counseling services at the University of St. Francis in Joliet.

"It seems logical that when you are preparing for an exam you would study late into the night, but that really works against us," Kubalewski said.

"Sleep is one of the most crucial things students need to do when preparing for exams and it is one of the first things to go. Without sleep, we don't remember things very well."

Training the brain to learn something new is similar to building muscle when exercising, he said. You want to stretch it to the limit to develop it, but not strain it to the point you damage it.

"I recommend that no one study longer than 90 minutes at a time," Kubalewski said. "Then take a 15 or 20 minute break and do something that is not like studying. If you knit or crochet, you can do that." Taking a walk might be even better, he added.

"Students can become very sedentary," he said. "They don't get outside much unless they work and they don't go outside and run unless they are involved in a sport. But one of the things that exercise does is build chemicals in the body that help us feel better and lessen anxiety. Anxiety is like static on the radio — it interferes with memory retrieval."

No one, he added, wants to feel anxious at test time. Yet

some students may experience anxiety to near phobic degrees, especially after doing poorly on a test. If that occurs, Kubalewski teaches a student to desensitize himself.

"We teach them relaxation techniques and how to 'rethink' test," he said. "Sometimes we work with them right in the classroom where they will be taking the test."

(630) 978-8310
HeraldNews Classifieds

SHOWPLACE 14
NEW LENOX 
OFF NELSON ROAD, AT U.S. 30 & I-80
1-800-FANDANGO EXPRESS CODE 1631 #
VISIT US ONLINE AT WWW.KERASOTES.COM
▶ No Passes or Discount Coupons
FREE REFILL on Popcorn & Soft Drinks!

SHOWTIMES FOR DECEMBER 8-11

- ▶ NOBEL SON (R) 1:30 4:15 7:00 10:00
- ▶ CADILLAC RECORDS (R) 12:50 3:30 6:40 9:20
- ▶ PUNISHER: WAR ZONE (R) 1:50 4:30 7:20 10:10
- ▶ FOUR CHRISTMASSES (PG-13) 1:10 2:00 3:40 4:50 6:05 7:10 8:20 9:30 10:40
- ▶ AUSTRALIA (PG-13) 2:50 6:20 9:50
- ▶ TRANSPORTER 3 (PG-13) 2:10 5:10 7:40 10:30
- ▶ BOLT (PG) 12:30 1:20 3:15 4:00 5:40 8:00 10:20
- ▶ TWILIGHT (PG-13) 1:00 1:40 3:50 4:40 6:50 7:30 9:40 10:15
- ▶ QUANTUM OF SOLACE (PG-13)
2:20 5:00 8:30 7:50 9:10 10:25
- ▶ MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA (PG)
12:40 3:00 5:30 7:45 10:05
- ▶ ROLE MODELS (R) 2:30 *5:20 *8:10 10:35;
*NO 5:20 8:10 SUNDAY 12:7 MONDAY 12:8
- ▶ SAW V (R) OPEN CAPTION
5:20 8:10 SUNDAY 12:7 MONDAY 12:8