

# Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Jamie Oliver Food Foundation (END0029)

## Introduction

Thank you for asking us to provide additional evidence to the Science and Technology Committee.

We support a ban on the sale of energy drinks to children, an evidence-based policy backed by a majority of the public, that's urgently needed to protect child health in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

We welcome the opportunity to have an open and balanced debate on this issue. We believe that hearing as much evidence on this subject as possible, from independent rather than industry-funded academics and experts, will lead the committee to recommend an evidence-based ban on the sale of energy drinks to children under 16.

This additional submission outlines the evidence that energy drinks are widely consumed by children in the UK, with levels being among the highest in Europe; that these drinks contribute significant amounts of caffeine to the diets of children; are linked to a host of negative health impacts; and lastly that there is a convincing case for government action.

### 1. Energy drinks are widely consumed by kids in the UK

Evidence shows that energy drinks are widely consumed by children and adolescents across the UK. Monster begins its submission by claiming that energy drinks are not widely consumed by children, citing the 2013 EFSA report which "found that more than 30% of UK adolescents (ages 10 to < 18 years) do not consume energy drinks at all".<sup>2</sup> In fact, this very report found that more than two thirds (69%) of UK adolescents (defined in the study as aged 10-18), and almost 1 in 4 (24%) of UK children (defined in the study as aged 3-10), were consumers of energy drinks.<sup>3</sup> In our view, this is clear evidence of widespread consumption among this vulnerable age group.

Consumption levels for UK adolescents and children are among the highest of the 16 European countries surveyed in the EFSA report. UK adolescents report the highest volume of energy drink consumption, with an average of 3.1 litres per month. 19% of UK adolescents reported being 'high chronic' energy drink consumers (consuming them at least 4 or 5 times per week), and 13% of UK adolescents reported being 'high acute' energy drink consumers (consuming at least 1 litre of energy drinks per single session).<sup>4</sup>

This fits with the findings of numerous other studies that also show worrying patterns of consumption. As cited in our previous submission, research from the Amy Winehouse Foundation in March 2018 found that more than 20% of 11-18 year olds reported drinking at least one energy drink every day; nearly 10% had two or more a day, and 5% drank at least three every day.<sup>5</sup>

Energy drinks contribute significantly to the overall caffeine intakes of children and adolescents. Monster cites, from the 2013 EFSA report, that 16.9% of an adolescent's total average caffeine intake comes from energy drinks. The figure is significantly higher for

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<sup>1</sup> A recent Mirror poll showing that 70% of people in every age group support a ban on sale of energy drinks to under 16s: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/three-quarters-brits-back-ban-11843467>

<sup>2</sup> [http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee/energy-drinks/written/86018.html#\\_ftn5](http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee/energy-drinks/written/86018.html#_ftn5)

<sup>3</sup> S. Zucconi et al., *Gathering Consumption Data on Specific Consumer Groups of Energy Drinks*, 10 EFSA J. 1, 91 (2013), available at <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.2903/sp.efsa.2013.EN-394>.

<sup>4</sup> S. Zucconi et al., *Gathering Consumption Data on Specific Consumer Groups of Energy Drinks*, 10 EFSA J. 1, 91 (2013), available at <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.2903/sp.efsa.2013.EN-394>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/schoolchildren-risk-developing-severe-health-12250394>

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children, with energy drinks contributing to around 43% of total daily exposure to caffeine in the 6-10 age group, and around 46% in the 3-5 age group.

The most popular energy drink brands among adolescents interviewed for the EFSA report cited by Monster were Red Bull (mentioned as first choice among the top three energy drink brands by 48% of consumers), followed by Monster (22%). No more than 5% of consumers listed any other energy drink brand as their first choice within their top three.

### **2. Energy drinks are persistently linked to a host of negative health impacts**

The landmark 2015 EFSA report gives the following verdict on the safety of caffeine for children and adolescents: "As only limited studies are available on the longer-term effects of caffeine on anxiety and behaviour in children and adolescents, there is substantial uncertainty regarding longer-term effects of habitual caffeine consumption in this age group. A level of no safety concern of 3 mg/kg bw per day (i.e. the level of no concern derived for single doses of caffeine for adults) is proposed for habitual caffeine consumption by children and adolescents. This approach is rather conservative in relation to the effects of caffeine on the cardiovascular system, but the limited studies available regarding the longer-term effects of caffeine on anxiety and behaviour in children and adolescents support the proposed caffeine intake level of no safety concern."

While acknowledging the uncertainty, EFSA explicitly propose a level of "no safety concern" for children and adolescents, in contrast to claims made in Monster's submission. An intake of 3 mg/kg of body weight per day is the level at which safety for children and adolescents can be assured. This means that an average 11-year-old weighing 35kg should consume no more than 105mg of caffeine per day.<sup>6</sup> With most energy drinks containing between 70 and 200mg of caffeine, and the highest packing 207mg of caffeine in just 2 ounces,<sup>7</sup> EFSA suggests that the safety of many of these drinks therefore cannot be confirmed.

Numerous other studies have linked sugary, caffeinated energy drinks to a host of negative health impacts, from anxiety to increased blood pressure and sleeplessness.<sup>8,9,10</sup> As outlined in our previous submission, in calls to the USA's National Poison Data System in 2010-11, the most frequently indicated symptoms cited related to energy drink exposure included vomiting, nausea, feeling jittery or on edge, headaches, trouble sleeping, palpitations, dizziness, fainting, and abdominal pain.<sup>11</sup> We don't think that these so-called 'mild effects' are conducive to effective learning in a classroom, and we wouldn't want these symptoms to be the daily reality for schoolchildren in the UK.

Despite the existence of a no-/low-sugar energy drink product offering, these no-/low-calorie energy drinks account for only 5% of total energy drink consumption, according to the BSDA 2016 report.<sup>12</sup> The most well-known brands contain about 55g (14 teaspoons) of sugar in a 475-500ml can. Evidence proves that excess sugar consumption is linked to a range of health problems, from obesity to Type-2 diabetes.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://foodresearch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Energy-drinks-final-19-July-2016.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Generali, Joyce A. "Energy drinks: food, dietary supplement, or drug?." *Hospital pharmacy* 48.1 (2013): 5.

<sup>8</sup> Nawrot, P., et al., Effects of caffeine on human health. *Food Additives and Contaminants*, 2003. 20: p. 1-30.

<sup>9</sup> Visram, Shelina, and Kawther Hashem. "Energy drinks: what's the evidence?." (2016).

<sup>10</sup> Sampasa-Kanyinga, Hugues, Hayley A. Hamilton, and Jean-Philippe Chaput. "Sleep duration and consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and energy drinks among adolescents." *Nutrition* 48 (2018): 77-81.

<sup>11</sup> Visram, Shelina, and Kawther Hashem. "Energy drinks: what's the evidence?." (2016).

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.britishsoftdrinks.com/write/MediaUploads/Publications/BSDA\\_Annual\\_report\\_2016.pdf](http://www.britishsoftdrinks.com/write/MediaUploads/Publications/BSDA_Annual_report_2016.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Breda, J., et al., Energy drink consumption in Europe: A review of the risks, adverse health effects and policy options to respond. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 2014

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### **3. There is a clear case for government legislation**

A BBC investigation published in June 2018 has found that supermarkets are still selling energy drinks to children, despite a voluntary ban by most major UK stores.<sup>14</sup> BBC Timeline went with a 15-year-old girl to eight supermarkets, and half of the supermarkets allowed her to buy an energy drink. We need government regulation to close these gaps, and ensure that there is a level playing field, as industry representatives such as Oliver Strudwick, the Public Affairs Manager for the British Soft Drinks Association, outlined in his oral evidence.<sup>15</sup>

Industry marketing techniques may not directly ‘target’ children; but they are very appealing to them, with branding and promotional strategies that capture their attention. The industry says that they do not market to children, and that they do not want children to drink their products. If this is the case, why are we letting kids drink them?

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-44630521>

<sup>15</sup> <https://goo.gl/LULscP>