

Popular Health Fads Harming the Heart

What Clinicians Need to Know

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1. Energy Drinks

What they are: Stimulant beverages regulated as foods, often containing multiple caffeine sources.

Why they matter: Increase blood pressure, heart rate, QTc; trigger atrial and ventricular arrhythmias, especially when combined with exercise or alcohol.

Clinical pearl: Energy drinks are stimulants—not hydration or sports-nutrition products.

2. Electrolyte Mixes

What they are: Sodium-containing hydration tools designed for prolonged or intense exercise.

When appropriate: Endurance exercise >60–90 minutes, heat exposure, heavy sweat losses.

Clinical pearl: Water is sufficient for most recreational exercisers.

3. Unregulated Supplements

Key facts: Regulated as foods with no FDA pre-market safety testing; mislabeling is common.

High-risk categories: Pre-workouts, fat burners, nootropics.

Clinical pearl: “Natural” does not mean safe.

Red Flags for Clinicians

Palpitations, syncope, or chest pain in young patients; use of energy drinks, powders, or supplements; multiple products stacked together; symptoms during or shortly after exercise.

Counseling Tips

Ask specifically about drinks and supplements, explain mechanisms simply, avoid judgment, recommend safer alternatives, and prioritize sleep, nutrition, and training over stimulants.

Key References

Higgins JP et al. *Curr Sports Med Rep*. 2018;17:65–72. Cohen PA et al. *Circulation*. 2020;141:e27–e52. Goldfarb M et al. *Am J Cardiol*. 2014;113:168–172. ACSM Position Stand. *Med Sci Sports Exerc*. 2021;53:164–182.