

Staying hydrated

The teenage body is made up of around 60% water. Not drinking enough water reduces productivity, both mentally and physically, and symptoms can include tiredness, confusion, reduced energy levels and the temptation to snack when not actually hungry (thirst is often mistaken for hunger).

Have water on hand at all times

The best way to make sure your child is drinking enough is to ensure they have water on hand at all times – at their desk, in bottles in their bag when on the go, and served alongside food. Plain water is ideal, but to add interest, use natural ingredients to give flavour – such as cucumber, lemon, lime, orange, tangerine, mint or ginger.

Other drinks

Natural fruit juices are great, but can be high in natural sugar, so why not dilute them? Herbal teas or honey with a dash of lemon offer hot, caffeine free alternatives. Limit your child's fizzy drink intake – whether calorie controlled or not, including energy drinks. They are all unhealthy if drunk in large quantities.

Eight glasses a day

Health experts recommend all adults to drink two or more litres of water a day. This equates to roughly eight 250ml glasses.



Caffeine



Caffeine affects us in different ways, and different people are more sensitive to it than others. On average, adults shouldn't consume more than 400mg of caffeine a day and adolescents should have much less.

Caffeine consumption

Caffeine is present in coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate so keep an eye on how much of these your child consumes. Energy shots are often very high in caffeine and a firm favourite with teens. Drinks with high caffeine (more than 150mg per litre) need to show this on the label, although it is not always clear – and it doesn't apply to drinks bought in coffee shops. Lots of products high in caffeine are available in health food shops which can give the impression that they're good for wellbeing but, like many things, can be harmful if taken in large quantities.

Coffee

If your child regularly drinks one or two cups of coffee each day, it's absolutely fine to continue this, even during exam time, as their body will be used to it. What's not good is introducing changes, so they shouldn't start drinking a cup of coffee or two during revision periods to help keep them alert if this is not something they do regularly.

Energy shots and drinks

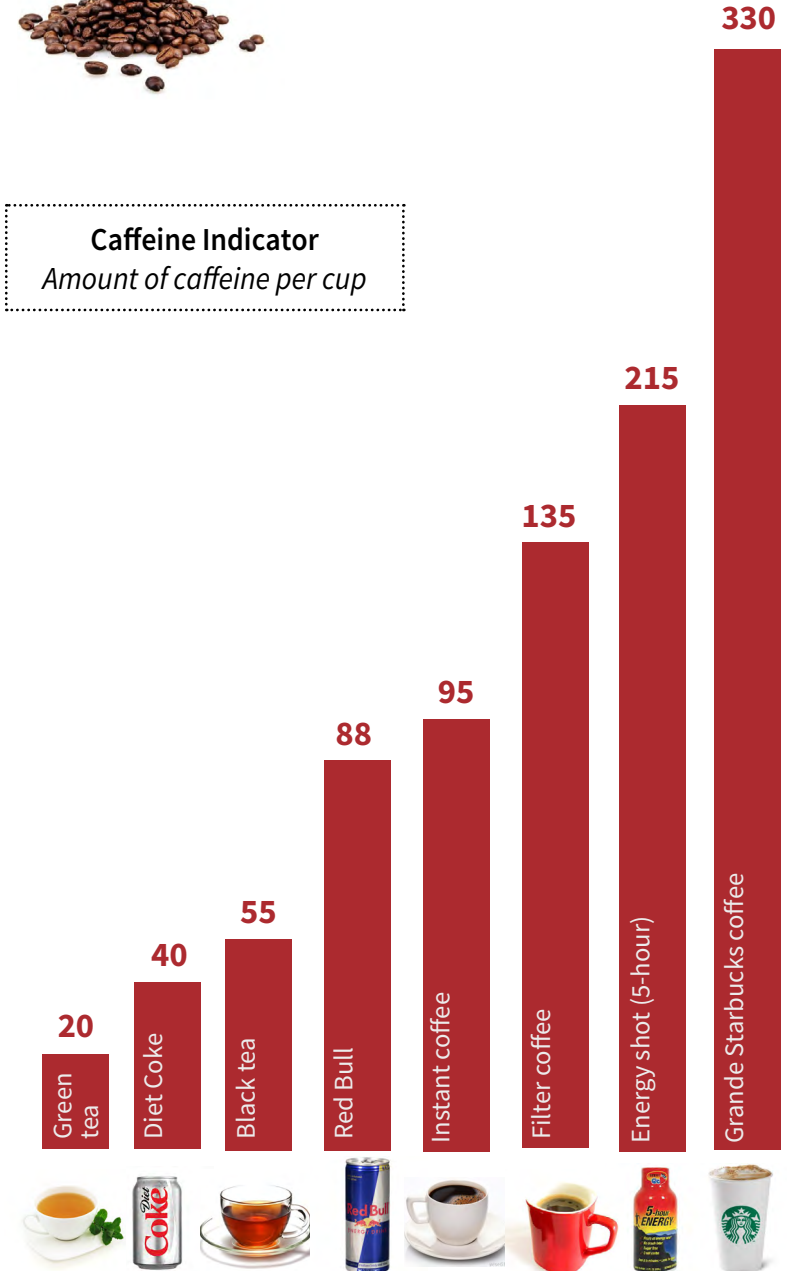
Energy shots can be deceptive as they are tiny in quantity but often packed with caffeine – for example a 60 ml shot can contain around 200mg of caffeine. Likewise, many energy drinks don't necessarily have huge percentages of caffeine, but they are served in large volumes (half litre bottles) so the amount of caffeine your child is drinking is a lot (160mg of caffeine in a can of Monster), whereas a small glass of the same product would be fine. Most supermarkets and high street stores have banned sales of energy drinks to under 16s.



Effects of caffeine

Too much caffeine can result in loss of sleep, loss of energy, low mood and low concentration – the opposite of what's needed to revise well. Caffeine is also long lasting, so drinking caffeine-high drinks in the afternoon can still impact on your child's ability to sleep that night. It's an absolute no to drinking coffee (or other caffeine fuelled drinks) late in the evening to try and overcome tiredness and revise into the night.

Caffeine Indicator
 Amount of caffeine per cup



Sleep

Sleep is an essential element for optimum health, so make sure your child is getting enough rest. Teenagers need a lot of sleep given the huge changes taking place in their bodies – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night. Tempting though it may be for them to revise into the small hours, they will be much better off putting work aside and settling down for an early night. Work backwards! If they have to get up at 7.00 am, then they need to be asleep by 11.00 pm – which probably means being in bed much earlier.

Mobiles, screens and sleep

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by ready access to a 24/7 online community via their phones such as Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, WhatsApp and other messaging services, not to mention their compulsion to play games and catch up with box sets late into the night.

To combat this you may want to minimise the number of screens they have in the bedroom, encourage them to have at least 30 mins screen-free time before settling down to sleep and get them to use night screen settings in the evening to reduce glare (white light on bright screens prevent sleepiness). Phones should be set to silent at bedtime so that sleep is not interrupted by regular pinging with alerts and messages.

Other ways to minimise phone time

Create rules for the whole family – such as no phones at the table during mealtimes, no phones before school, no phones after 9:00 pm. If you do this, it's important you're consistent (don't set a bad example by ignoring the rule if it doesn't suit you). Establish rewards for appropriate phone use and penalties for inappropriate use.

Importantly, have conversations with your teen about using mobiles sensibly at times when neither of you are tired nor emotional. This will avoid heated discussions or rows and you're much more likely to reach a compromise that suits you both.



A bedtime routine

Creating a “bedtime” routine, such as switching the phone to silent, putting it away 30 minutes before bed, taking a bath, having a hot drink and dimming the lights can all help calm the mind and prepare it for sleep.

Sticking to a similar routine every night signals to the body that it is time for bed and helps it switch off so try to get your child into the habit of doing the same things before bed and going to sleep at a similar time (especially on week nights).

Avoid lie-ins

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning and, hard though it may be, try to limit lie-ins at the weekend to just an extra hour or so in bed. Long lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at an appropriate time on Sunday night and consequently, making it harder for them to wake up on time on Monday mornings.

Where possible, bedtimes and get-up times should be similar from one day to the next allowing the body to synch to a regular cycle. Make plans for weekend mornings so they have a reason to get up if there aren't activities they can do through school or if they aren't inclined to organise anything themselves.

Useful links

NHS
Live Well
Guide

Sleep
Council
UK