START FITNESS™

THE MONSTER IN YOU!

By Stephanie and SSG Ken Weichert
Photos byJonathan Miller

"What do you mean he's disqualified?" I asked. I was at MEPS checking on the status of the blood tests on a Prior Service applicant, just over 40 years of age. My guidance counselor explained, "He was disqualified for high blood pressure." I refuted, "Doesn't that seem odd? You saw his VA blood work from six months ago. He did not have high blood pressure six months ago." "I know SSG," she continued. "Find out what he is doing differently since his VA lab work. If it can be fixed, you can submit a NGB Medical Waiver."

I called my applicant after leaving MEPS. After routine salutations, I told Ted about his blood test results. "Ted, I don't get it," I exclaimed. "You're in great shape. You workout regularly and your diet is good. You've got a great family and you seem to like your job. In six months, what about your life has changed?" "Nothing," he replied. "Have you changed your diet at all?" I asked. "Not really," he responded. "What about coffee?" I asked. This was the moment of truth. "Yeah, a couple of cups in the morning," he confessed.

Now, we were getting somewhere. I continued, "What about water, alcohol, or other liquids?" He paused. He admitted to me that he had been substituting energy drinks for bottled water. This was alarming news. Basically, he determined that he had been consuming an average of two to three energy drinks a day for the last six months. I laid it on the line for my applicant. "Ted, if you don't your change your diet drastically, you may wind up diabetic or worse."

START Fitness™ has had clients ranging in age, background and socioeconomic status. One common theme with all of our clients seems to be "get more done in less amount of time." Our clients are sleeping less and working longer hours. The recent trend is to get more out of the day by increasing productivity. Many of our clients and some of SGT Ken's™ Army National Guard applicants are turning to energy drinks as a source of fuel. We couldn't be more alarmed.

Although we do not claim to replace the advice of a doctor, we will say that the facts are out there, but energy drinks are so new to the market place, the long-term health effects have yet to be studied. Although cigarettes were once a fashionable trend in the mid-1900s, they were later found to be unhealthy. Along that line, we propose that energy drinks may be an unstudied, unhealthy caffeinated-drink alternative.

EXCESSIVE CAFFEINE CONSUMPTION

Research suggests that the overload of caffeine can cause a variety of dangerous side effects. Overload of caffeine may lead to heart problems in some cases, heart palpitations, increased heart rate and increased blood pressure. "The Food and Drug Administration recommends a maximum caffeine concentration of 65 milligrams per 12 ounces of cola beverages, though it does not regulate the caffeine content of these drinks," states Bruce Goldberger, director of the University of Florida's William R. Maples Center for Forensic Medicine (www.csrees.usda.gov). The problem is that energy drinks are known for and marketed as having excess caffeine in each drink. It is marketed as a lifestyle, as the buzzed way you should get through your busy day. Many energy drinks have 80 milligrams or more per serving. The drink called *Cocaine* has 280 milligrams of caffeine. This drink has over three times the amount of caffeine per

ILLUSTRATION BY SEAMAS GALLAGHER, NICOLE SYLVESTER

serving. Many energy drinks have between 80-200mg of caffeine per serving. Because there is no regulation, the product is not required to carry a warning label.

What happens when multiple servings of energy drinks are consumed? Some studies show that too much of a good thing can prove to be toxic. According to the Nutrition and Health Info Sheet produced by Ph.D.s at the University of Davis in November 2006, caffeine consumption in excess of 400 milligrams may lead to nervousness, irritability, sleeplessness, increased urination (dehydration), abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmia), decreased bone levels and stomach upset. An article posted by Brown University (www.brown.edu) on January 7, 2005 states that "energy drinks' stimulating properties can boost the heart rate and blood pressure (sometimes to the point of palpitations), dehydrate the body, and, like other stimulants, prevent sleep."

It seems that the prevention of sleep is generally why people are drinking energy drinks in the first place. However, would you knowingly drink a drink that might potentially elevate your heart rate, blood pressure, give you heart palpitations, leave you dehydrated and tired, and may lead to diabetes?

EXCESSIVE SUGAR CONSUMPTION

Unfortunately, energy drinks have more than just caffeine. Many of them are also packed with sugar. The sugar overload may cause sleepiness instead of energy and may lead to symptoms of diabetes.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Web site (www.fda.gov) states that based on a 2000-calorie-per-day diet for adults, a healthy diet should not include more than 300 grams of carbohydrates. The level of carbohydrates is based on 60 percent of total calories consumed. Sugar falls under this category. The web site www.health.gov lists 18 grams of refined sugars as a discretionary calorie allowance for a healthy diet based on consuming 2,000 calories per day.

Because of the perception that bigger is better, people often consume more than the serving size of eight ounces. However, even adhering to the recommended serving size doesn't necessarily provide a good benchmark from which to start. Many of the energy drinks boast over 50 grams of sugar packed into one serving size. This is more than twice the discretionary calorie allowance set by the USDA Food Guide. The worst part is, people are drinking multiple energy drinks.

According to the Harvard School of Public Health (www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutrition-source/diabetes.html), more than 18 million Americans have diabetes. The article states that if Americans continue on the same growth trend, 22 million people will have diabetes in 2025. While some people are born with a predisposition for diabetes, it is becoming more common for adults to develop type-two diabetes as a result their lifestyles.

In an article from Harvard Health Letter printed by Newstarget.com on November 6, 2006 entitled "Sugary Beverages Fuel the Obesity Epidemic," researchers issued a warning to people who believe sugar-sweetened drinks to be healthy. The article went on to state, "Harvard researchers recently reported that women who drank one or more sugar-sweetened soft drinks per day were 83 percent more likely to develop type-two diabetes than women who drank less than one a month. Not surprisingly, they were also more likely to gain weight."

Excessive sugars may actually lead to slower reaction times and sleepiness. The quick fix of consuming the added refined sugars causes the blood sugar to spike and then drop to an unnaturally low level. Low blood sugar can lead to low energy levels.

EFFECTS OF EXCESSIVE* CAFFEINE CONSUMPTION INCLUDE:

- nervousness
- irritability
- sleeplessness
- increased urination (dehydration)
- abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmia)
- decreased bone levels
- stomach upset

*400 milligrams or more a day

NOT WORTH THE RUSH

So consider this article to be a warning. Energy drinks look really cool. The marketing is genius. However, with all of the health risks associated with consuming unhealthy levels of sugar and caffeine, we suggest that drinking energy drinks is not worth the momentary rush.

Ted agreed to stop drinking energy drinks as well as all other forms of caffeine. After two weeks of consuming nothing but water, nutritious foods and exercising regularly, he went for a third round of blood tests. His results came back normal. With his first set of test results from the VA from six months ago and his second from two weeks ago while at MEPS, and now with the new results, I had Ted write a letter to explain the cause of his temporary high blood pressure.

One week later, we received his waiver and enlisted him in the California Army National Guard. He was very happy about his opportunity to serve his state and country. He was even happier about his newfound health. However, we are especially fortunate that we noticed his problem before it became irreversible. GX

WARNING: Always seek the advice and guidance of a qualified health provider with any questions or concerns you may have prior to commencing a fitness program. This article should not be relied on or substituted for professional medical diagnosis or treatment. The exercises presented are for suggestion only. Participate at your own risk. Stop if you feel faint or shortness of breath.

Introducing START *e*Fitness™

A sneak peek at the newest feature seen in *GX Intel* and GXonline.com

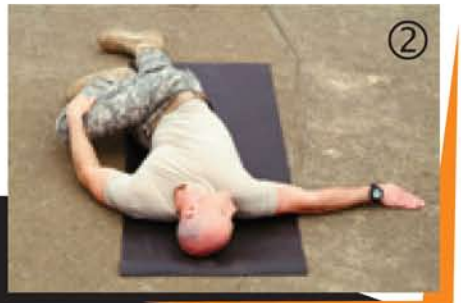
By SSG Ken Weichert

WHAT IS START *e*FITNESS™?

Stephanie and I receive emails daily from Soldiers and family members living all over the world that include some very important health questions or concerns. With the launch of START *e*Fitness™, we will be able to provide *GX Intel* and GXonline.com subscribers quick and simple health and fitness tips, not covered anywhere else.

The three main components of physical fitness are Strength, Stamina, and Flexibility. Many of our fitness programs published in *GX* magazine do not include details concerning the third main component of physical fitness: Flexibility.

To promote maximum flexibility, my absolute favorite stretching exercise is . . .



THE TRUNK STRETCH

- Start Position: Lay flat on the ground, beginning with your entire body forming a straight line.
- Action: First, bend your left leg at the knee until it forms a 90-degree angle. Then, slowly twist the trunk of your body by letting your knee fall directly to your right. Use your right hand and arm to assist you in holding your leg as close to the ground as possible. Bring your left arm out until your left underarm forms a 90-degree angle. Look to your left and hold (①). Slowly return to the Start Position and switch directions (②). Warning: Do not bounce during any stretching exercises. Remember to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Time to Hold: 20-30 seconds

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