

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2009

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Caffeine buzz keeps you alert

Caffeine really does keep you awake and alert, but energy drinks may have the opposite effect, a University of Tasmania study has found.

People often resort to caffeine through coffee or taurine through energy drinks to help perform complex tasks such as driving when tired. But how well do they actually work?

University of Tasmanian School of Psychology graduate Amy Peacock investigated the effects of these stimulants on information processing for her honours study.

Ms Peacock asked participants to identify printed numbers in three states of degradation, from clear to blurred. The more piecemeal, the harder it was to tell what the number was.

She tested response time and information processing to these numbers and found the participants responded faster to these images under the influence of caffeine compared to no stimulants, in all situations.

However, taurine, which is one of the main stimulants used in energy drinks, only improved performance at the later stages of processing, meaning those where action is required.

A combination of caffeine and taurine improve performance only in the early stages of information processing, which involve recognition. But in the later stages of processing, when used together, taurine decreases the effectiveness of caffeine, the research has found.

“Therefore overall synthetic taurine acts as a stimulant with caffeine at early stages of processing but has an inhibitory effect on caffeine at later processing stages,” Ms Peacock said.

For more information/interviews, please call supervisor Dr Frances Martin on 6226 2262.

Information Released by:

The Media Office, University of Tasmania

Phone: 6226 2124 Mobile: 0417 517 291

Email: Media.Office@utas.edu.au