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CAFFEINE POWDER BECOMING A DANGEROUS CHOICE FOR TEENS SEEKING A THRILL

On July 21, 2014, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a Consumer Advice about powdered pure caffeine. It followed the death of an 18 year-old Ohio student in May which was cause by an unintentional overdose of a powdered, pure caffeine product. The FDA has stated that it is looking into regulating the sale of bulk caffeine powder but as of October 27, 2014, has taken no action.

The problem is that such products are essentially 100 percent caffeine. Caffeine is generally regarded as safe for normal adults at recommended doses. But overdoses can produce significant and possibly even life-threatening effects, including seizures and abnormal heart rhythms. Effects can vary from one person to the next, depending on weight, other medications, and the presence of other medical conditions, which may make some people more susceptible to the effects of caffeine. In general, an adult should avoid having more than 200 mg in a single dose and consume less than 600 milligrams of caffeine in any one day.

Being certain that one is getting no more than the maximum allowable dose is not easy with the powdered caffeine products. 1/16th of a “teaspoon” of powdered, pure caffeine contains about 200 milli-grams of caffeine, the equivalent of a large cup of coffee. Measuring implements in a typical kitchen are not sufficient to accurately measure a desired (and safe) dose of this product. A “teaspoon” of caffeine powder, could contain 3,200 milligrams of caffeine, over 15 times the recommended dose for a 70 kg adult. The toxic and even lethal potential of pure caffeine powder is clear.

In addition to the issues of accurate measurement and dosing, there are particular issues with regard to pediatric use of caffeine. There is, of course, the risk of accidental exposure in very young children, as with any household chemical. And there are also the uncertain risks of caffeine exposure in childhood. The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that caffeine has no place the diets of children and adolescents. Even at levels of exposure that are considered safe for most children, certain individuals may be at increased risk of caffeine toxicity, particularly those with neurologic (e.g. seizures) and cardiac (e.g. abnormal heart rhythm) conditions which may not have been diagnosed previously.

In summary, there is no place for caffeine in the diets of children and adolescents and it should be avoided altogether. Powdered, pure caffeine has particular risks in its use in the home. The FDA has issued a warning advising avoiding this product. Here is the link to the FDA’s advisory:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/SafetyAlertsAdvisories/ucm405787.htm>

This informative article was written by Dr. Steven Seifert, MD, a clinical toxicologist and Director of the New Mexico Poison Control