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Relaxation drinks ^[1]

Dear Alice,

So we hear about energy drinks all the time and the possible dangers. What about all these "relaxation drinks" that keep showing up. Safe? Effective? What should I know?

— A Sip of Calm

Answer

Dear A Sip of Calm,

Can we actually find relaxation in a can? Seems like it could be a great idea, unfortunately, at this point in time, it's just too good to be true. Just like herbal supplements, the FDA does not require companies manufacturing the "relaxation beverages" to prove their claims or standardize their ingredients. As such, there is no conclusive scientific evidence that any of these products are safe and effective. What little research has been done has shown that many compounds in these drinks, such as 5-HTP and melatonin, degrade in water. Other ingredients such as GABA, cannot cross the blood-brain barrier so are completely ineffective. One study even tested five popular brands and found that many of the ingredients listed were barely even present in the drinks themselves!

Two popular ingredients in relaxation beverages that have been studied are valerian and kava and the news is not good. Valerian can cause dependency if taken regularly while kava has been shown to cause liver damage. These types of ingredients can also interact with medications such as Allegra or benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium, Ativan, etc.) or even with Tylenol and cause serious health problems.

What's your best bet for relaxation? For starters, maintaining a proper diet, exercising, and trying to keep a regular sleep schedule can contribute to feelings of relaxation. You may also want to try [meditation and/or yoga](#) ^[2].

In the end, the best way to guarantee a good night's sleep is to take time to unwind in the evening, and leave your bedroom for sleeping only. Enjoy some (decaf) tea, relax, close your eyes, turn off your phone and all other screens, and you'll be off to dream land in no time.

Alice!

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