

BY RUSSELL WILCOX

ENERGY DRINKS

They're hot, they're hip, they're everywhere. Energy drinks promise a quick pick-me-up, but that quick boost of energy comes with some hefty drawbacks, both physically and spiritually.

A stake president was scheduled to meet with a young man to interview him and help him complete his mission application. The young man was a bright student and had saved money for his mission. He attended church regularly and was worthy of a temple recommend. Still, the stake president had one concern: The young man was drinking 12 energy drinks a day! In their meeting, the stake president suggested that he break the energy-drink habit before they submitted the application to the Missionary Department.

"No problem, President," said the young man. "It's not a habit. I can quit anytime." They scheduled another interview a week later and the young man left. The following day he found out just how much of a habit his non-habit had become. His body was craving the drinks, and it was difficult to say no to himself. By midweek he called the stake president for a blessing. "I guess I really was more addicted than I thought," he said. "This is really hard."

The blessing was given, and the stake president continued to meet with the young man and monitor his progress. The process actually took months, but finally this young man felt ready to submit his application. His advice to others: "Don't be fooled.

Just because something isn't specifically mentioned in the Word of Wisdom doesn't mean there aren't negative consequences."

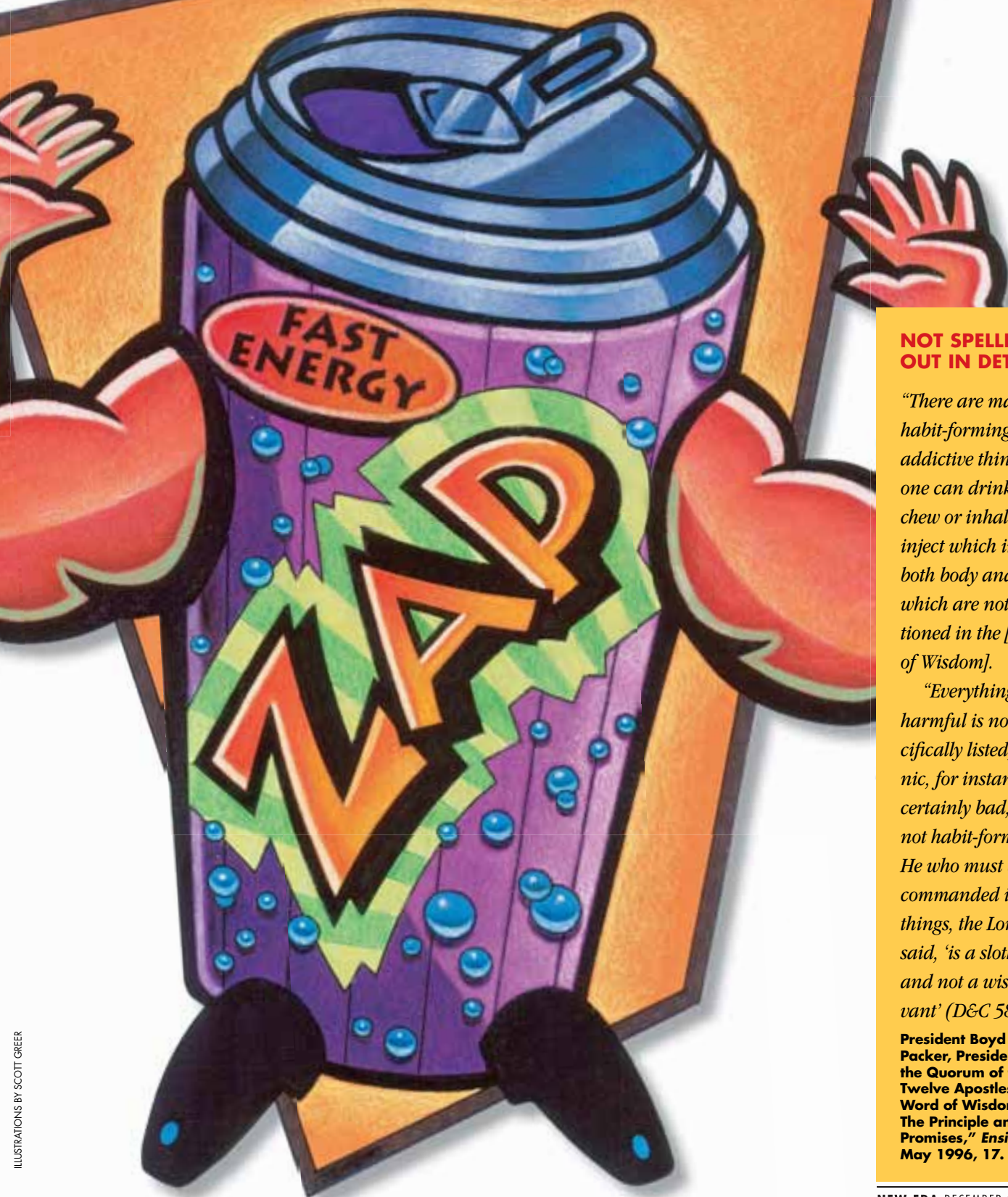
Energy drinks are powerful, easily available, and well marketed. Companies boast record sales that increase dramatically every year. There is no doubt the drinks pack a punch, but is it a punch that picks you up or knocks you down? In the long run, the drinks can have a negative effect both physically and spiritually.

Physical Consequences

While some people claim energy drinks improve their performance and concentration, such statements can be misleading. The drinks increase your heart rate and blood pressure, dehydrate your body, and prevent sleep—all of which can have devastating long-term effects.

Some high schools have banned the drinks from sporting events because student athletes, who were drinking them to stay alert and focused, were actually fainting. The combination of the fluid lost from sweating and the diuretic quality of the drinks (which

The Lift . . .



NOT SPELLED OUT IN DETAIL

“There are many habit-forming, addictive things that one can drink or chew or inhale or inject which injure both body and spirit which are not mentioned in the [Word of Wisdom].

“Everything harmful is not specifically listed; arsenic, for instance—certainly bad, but not habit-forming! He who must be commanded in all things, the Lord said, ‘is a slothful and not a wise servant’ (D&C 58:26).”

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Word of Wisdom: The Principle and the Promises,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 17.

That Lets You

makes it hard for the body to absorb water) was leaving these athletes severely depleted.

Perhaps the greatest physical concern is that the body builds up a tolerance to these drinks, and people have to drink more and more to feel the same effect. In some cases this escalating cycle has opened the door to experimentation with pills and alcohol.

Spiritual Consequences

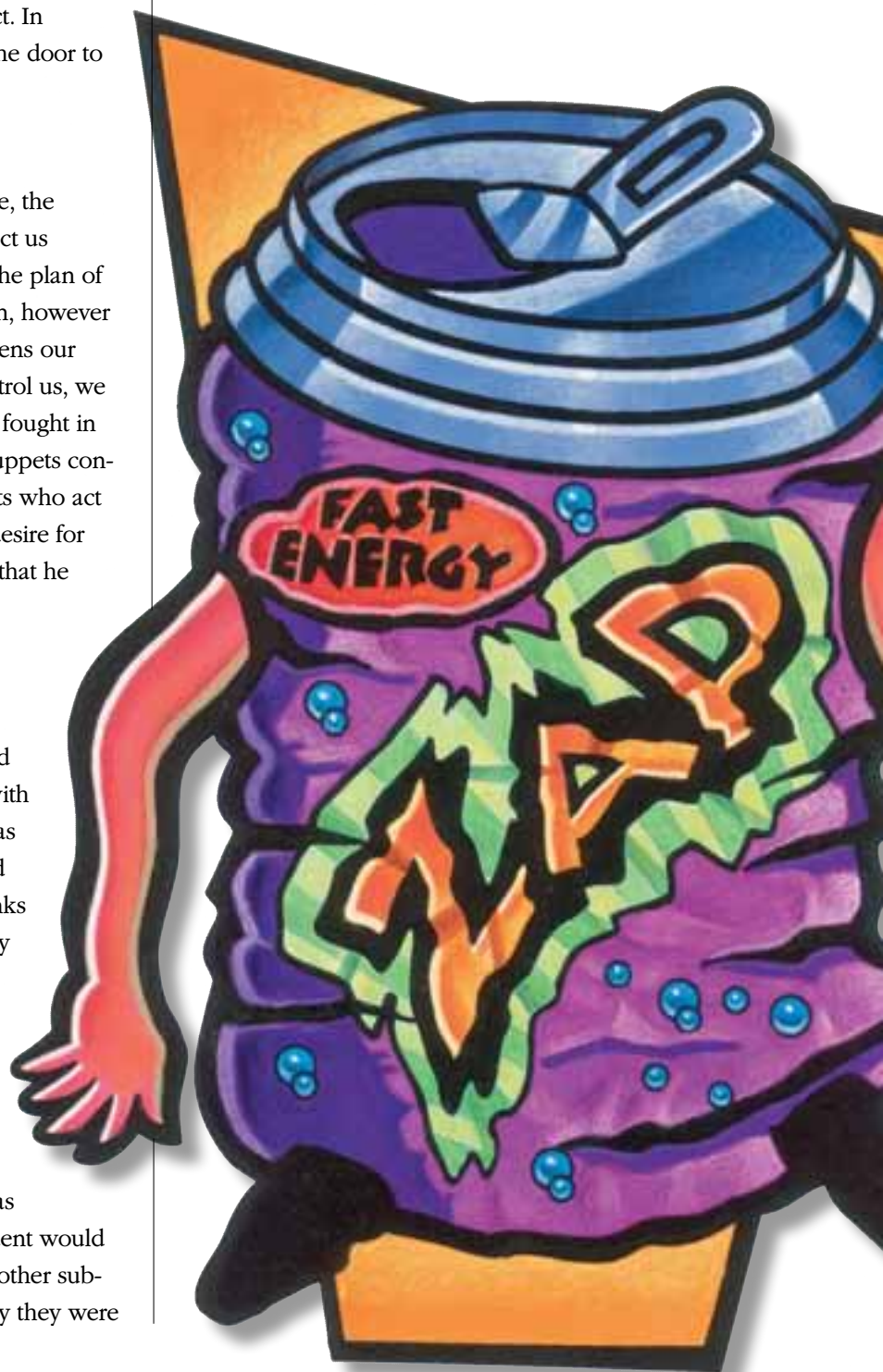
As serious as the physical consequences are, the greater concern is how energy drinks can affect us spiritually. Agency is absolutely necessary in the plan of salvation (see Moses 3:17; 7:32). Any addiction, however minor or innocent, is serious because it threatens our agency. When we allow any substance to control us, we surrender a part of the freedom for which we fought in the pre-earth life. We allow ourselves to be puppets controlled by outside influences rather than agents who act for themselves. This is contrary to the Lord's desire for us. "Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself" (2 Nephi 2:16).

Along with giving us freedom, God has given us the light of Christ and the gift of the Holy Ghost to guide us in using that freedom. This heavenly direction is often communicated through feelings, so any substance that toys with our emotions has the potential to confuse us as we attempt to receive, recognize, and respond to the Spirit. Advertisements claim energy drinks heighten our senses, but in fact, over time they can dull them and leave us questioning what we feel.

Use Your Brain

One college professor who was not a member of the Church would delight in asking an LDS student if this or that substance was "against the Word of Wisdom." When the student would respond yes, the professor would quickly list other substances that are "just as bad" and question why they were

While the stimulants that give energy drinks their jolt may offer a short energy burst, it is quickly gone, leaving you severely depleted.



Down

not also “on the list.”

Finally, one day the student said, “I make some choices in my life because God has given me commandments. I make other choices because He has given me a brain.” The student was correct. Everything we should or should not eat and drink is not listed in the revelations and every possible wise or unwise choice is not spelled out in the pages of *For the Strength of Youth*. The Lord has said, “It is not meet that I should command in all things” (D&C 58:26).

Break the Habit

For those desiring to end their dependence on energy drinks, take it one step at a time. It takes a while to develop such a habit, so it won't be overcome immediately. Set reasonable and realistic goals that will leave you feeling successful rather than overwhelmed by an impossible task.

Seek help. Parents, along with youth leaders, can offer support. And though drinking energy drinks is certainly not something that has to be confessed, most bishops stand more than ready to help you reach any positive goal.

Turn to natural sources of energy. The best way to avoid a negative behavior is to replace it with a positive one. If energy is what you seek, find it through more exercise, a good night's sleep, and a nutritious diet. Draw near to your Heavenly Father. Determine to make service, scripture study, and prayer more regular patterns in your life.

When the stake president asked the young man to break his dependence on energy drinks before beginning his mission, the young man found it difficult. After several months of hard work, that missionary entered the MTC and wrote the following in a letter to his stake president: “I want to thank you for all your help preparing me to serve. This place is incredible. The Spirit is so strong in all the classes and devotionals. You can even feel it when you are walking down the halls. This feeling is better than any energy drink!” **NE**

THE ENERGY DRINK ADDICTION

BY THOMAS J. BOUD, MD

You've seen these drinks all over television and in the stores. Over the past several years, high-dose caffeine energy drinks have been aggressively marketed to teens and young adults. In 2006 alone, about 500 new brands of energy drinks were introduced. In fact, 7.6 million young people say they have used energy drinks, with consumption more than doubling in the past three years. The energy drink industry in the United States alone has ballooned into a \$3 billion-a-year enterprise.¹

But not all caffeinated drinks are created equal; the amount of caffeine varies greatly from one drink to another. Most cola soft drinks have from 22 to 55 milligrams (mg) of caffeine. By comparison, energy drinks can have from 80 to 500 mg of caffeine in one can!² Beverage companies compete to market the drink that gives the biggest jolt. To do this, they combine caffeine with other substances such as sugars, alcohol, or other stimulants in order to intensify its effects. These drinks often come in larger and larger containers.

What are the consequences of high caffeine consumption? First and foremost, caffeine is a central nervous system stimulant that can lead to addiction. Both as a doctor and as a member of the Church, I recognize the physical, mental, and spiritual dangers of any addictive substance. Any addictive behavior, whatever the source, can lead to a loss of spiritual health and freedom. I have treated a number of caffeine-related medical conditions in young people and in adults. These conditions include jitteriness, agitation, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, dehydration, weight gain, depression, high blood pressure, and rapid heart rate. There have even been reports of deaths as a direct result of caffeine overdose.³

To read more about the potential dangers of energy drinks, see Dr. Boud's article in this month's *Ensign* magazine.

NOTES

1. See Sharon Worcester, “Energy Drink Trends Alarm Some; No Data Back Safety,” *Family Practice News*, Feb. 1, 2007, 1.
2. See www.energyfiend.com/the-caffeine-database.
3. See Sarah Kerrigan and Tania Lindsey, “Fatal Caffeine Overdose: Two Case Reports,” *Forensic Science International*, Oct. 4, 2005, 67–69.