

energy drink you can buy enough fruit for a week. And for the average office worker, eating a snack every afternoon in addition to regular meals is going to mean some weight gain (unless they are compensating with smaller meals at night).

Once you hit the store, you'll have plenty of popular energy-boosting products to choose from, so we asked for Gazdag's take on a few.

Red Bull Energy Drink

Tagline: "Gives you wings"

Tastes like: Liquid gummy bears

Cost: \$2.04

While Red Bull may have the cachet of being the drink of choice for ravers worldwide, according to Gazdag, the only ingredients in Red Bull that boost energy are the carbohydrates (the simple sugars glucose and sucrose) and caffeine. "Caffeine stimulates your nervous system, so you may feel more alert," she says. "Some people feel much more productive but others get jittery and can't focus." Red Bull also touts a special ingredient—taurine—an amino acid that occurs naturally in the body (a synthetic version is used in the drink) and is supposed to assist with "detoxifying," or cleansing the body. But Gazdag says that's not a valid claim. "Detoxifying your body is not something that an ingredient in a food can do for you." Red Bull will certainly provide a kick (about the same as a cup of coffee), but it is not the best choice from a health perspective because it offers pure carbohydrates and no nutrients. "It's basically soda," says Gazdag.

PowerBar (banana flavor)

Tagline: "Fuel for optimum performance"

Tastes like: Banana taffy

Cost: \$1.49

"It's about image," says Gazdag. "Not many people eat energy bars as a snack because they taste good." PowerBars were developed for endurance athletes who needed something convenient to eat while exercising—not for the average office worker. "Energy bars tend to be super-supplemented with a lot of vitamins and minerals, and unfortunately that gives people the impression that they are a healthy snack," she says. According to Gazdag, just because a food has a lot of vitamins and minerals added to it doesn't mean that your body can or will absorb all the nutrients listed on the package. While PowerBars won't give you a buzz like Red Bull, they do contain a good amount of carbohydrates, along with some

protein and a bit of fat, which make them a healthier choice. Still, Gazdag advises against thinking of your PowerBar as a multivitamin. "People think they are getting everything they need because they have an energy bar, and then they don't pay attention to their diet for the rest of the day." Energy bars shouldn't replace meals. If you routinely skip lunch and then find yourself at the convenience store at slump time, you'd be much better off concentrating your efforts on bringing or buying a decent lunch.

Fresh Samantha Protein Blast

Tagline: "A protein fruit drink"

Tastes like: A slightly chalky fruit smoothie

Cost: \$2.49

Compared with Red Bull and PowerBars, Gazdag says that Fresh Samantha is the healthiest energizing snack for the simple reason that it is more "real food" than the other two products (it's closest to actually eating an apple, a banana, or an orange). "When we talk about making healthy food choices, we are really talking about trying to choose fruits and vegetables, and products that are less processed," she says. Gazdag points out that the added ingredients (like the soy protein in this product) don't pro-

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vide extra value, because there is usually not enough to provide the same health benefits that a supplement would provide. "Just drinking the Fresh Samantha with St. John's wort doesn't mean that all of a sudden you are going to feel a little less depressed," she says.

Gazdag believes that the popularity of energy snacks is due to the premium that we place on time in our hectic lives. "If we had healthier lifestyles in general, independent of our diet, we might find that we were less drawn to energy boosters." Maybe the nap isn't such a bad idea after all. ◀

Danyel Barnard is the editor of experience magazine. She experimented with various energy boosters while writing this article.