

By Caroline Bellamy

They contain no artificial sweeteners, colours, or preservatives and their natural 'health boosting' claims entice millions worldwide to spend an incredible £2.8 billion on these drinks a year. But what health benefits – if any – do they really have? 'Drinking "natural" is a lifestyle choice because too often we assume artificial ingredients are bad for us,' says nutritionist Dr Carrie Ruxton. 'Although there are lots of scare stories about artificial additives, E numbers have been tested rigorously by the European Union and put on an approved list. Health drinks are mainly water and many products don't contain enough of an active ingredient to make a difference to you,' she adds.

Here Dr Ruxton takes a closer look at the bestselling natural beverages to see what they might – or might not – do for your health.

**RED BULL COLA, 69p****INGREDIENTS:**

Water, sugar, carbon dioxide, caramel sugar syrup, natural flavourings from plant extracts

(0.37pc), galangal, vanilla, mustard seeds, caffeine from coffee beans (0.013pc), lime, cola nut, cocoa, liquorice, cinnamon, lemon, ginger, coca leaf, orange, corn mint, pine, cardamom, mace, clove, lemon juice concentrate.

VERDICT: Caffeine from the coffee beans and cocoa is a stimulant and in moderate amounts it makes you more alert, improves cognitive functions and sports performance. Safe limits are 300mg to 500mg a day – after that you may have sleep problems. But this has a tiny amount of caffeine, almost negligible.

It's interesting that coca leaf – another stimulant – is in there because it is classed as a drug in the US (but not in the UK) thanks to its link with cocaine. Cardamom and mace don't add to the stimulant effect, they are simply for flavour.

**PURDEYS MULTIVITAMIN FRUIT DRINK 82p****INGREDIENTS:**

Fruit juices from concentrate 57 per cent, (grape, apple), carbonated spring water 42 per cent, botanical

extracts (damiana, bayberry bark, prickly ash bark, Chinese ginseng), natural flavourings, citric acid, Vitamins (C, niacin, B6, thiamin,

They're sold as natural energy boosters. But, as we discover here, at least one of these pricey drinks may be no better for you than eating an orange

CRUSHING:
The drinks are mainly water



The great health drink illusion

riboflavin, folacin, B12), glucose. Free from caffeine and artificial sweeteners.

VERDICT: The active ingredient here is damiana, which is linked to weight management. A study on the herbal remedy Zotrim, which contains damiana, yerba mate and guarana found significant weight loss. The herbs are believed to stimulate metabolism and increase feelings of fullness.

The Chinese root ginseng – which is less active than the Siberian form – is thought to reduce stress. But is there enough here? You need between 0.3g and 2g a day of ginseng to have any effect on stress.

Folacin is good for women who are planning to get pregnant, but the rest is all fluff. There might be a study on a mouse somewhere to say bayberry bark is good for you, but it doesn't mean it's any good for humans.

**NAKED SUPERFOOD £2.30****INGREDIENTS:**

Apple juice 59pc, mango puree, pineapple juice 10pc, banana puree, kiwi puree 9pc, botanical extracts 0.5pc, powdered spirulina, chlorella, broccoli,

spinach, barley grass, wheat grass, parsley, ginger root, blue green algae and odourless garlic, natural flavourings. No added sugar, no preservatives.

VERDICT: Probably very tasty as apple, mango and pineapple are all very sweet, but there's not much of real value in there.

Garlic is good for the heart, but I doubt there's enough in here to have an effect. As for powdered spirulina, chlorella, blue green algae etc, these things may have benefits but there's

no evidence on humans. In 2010, when new health regulations come in, this drink will not be allowed to say it contains a 'superfood' unless it has an approved health claim.

**FIREFLY – ALL NATURAL £1.49****INGREDIENTS:**

Still water, fruit juices from concentrate (white grape, grapefruit, orange, passion fruit), apple juice extract,

botanical extracts 1pc (yerba mate, Siberian ginseng, cardamom, guarana, rosemary, Chinese wolfberry), natural flavourings.

VERDICT: There is evidence that yerba mate and guarana are linked to weight management. Guarana is also a natural source of caffeine and ginseng is believed to lower physical and mental stress. Chinese wolfberry

**BIG SHOTZ – £1.49****INGREDIENTS:**

Water, fruit juice from concentrate (apple 14pc, mango 12pc, passion fruit 5pc), fructose, inulin, malodextrin, fish oil.

Mineral premix: Magnesium phosphate, calcium phosphate, zinc gluconate, sodium selenite, ferric pyrophosphate, copper gluconate. Acidity regulators: Citric acid, malic acid. Flavourings: Vitamin premix: Vitamin C, Vitamin E, niacin, beta-carotene, biotin, pantothenic acid, Vitamin B6, folic acid, Vitamin D, Vitamin B2, Vitamin B12. Thickeners: Guar gum, xanthan gum, Korean ginseng. No artificial colours, flavours or sweeteners.

VERDICT: Good to see this has the prebiotic inulin – this helps stimulate good bacteria in your body and it also helps you to absorb calcium and magnesium. You need 2g-5g for it to be of any benefit but we don't know how much is in this drink. I'm doubtful there is enough fish oil. You need 5ml to 10ml a day, which would surely affect the taste in such a small bottle.

The label says it contains your 100 per cent recommended daily amount of all the vitamins apart from Vitamin A, which is sensible as too much Vitamin A is not good for pregnant women.

**SIP (your way to better, beautiful skin) £1.29**

INGREDIENTS: Water, fruit concentrate, lemon juice concentrate, natural flavourings, herbal extract blend (lime flower, rose petal, sweet violet, marigold, heather, white tea),

antioxidants, Vitamin C (ascorbic acid), sodium selenite, natural beautifying complex with no artificial sweeteners.

VERDICT: I can't find anything that will help the skin apart from Vitamin C, which is an antioxidant. I have found no clinical evidence that lime flower or rose petal have any benefits for the skin. And at £1.29 for 500ml you'd be better off eating an orange.

● Prices correct on October 8 from Waitrose or Sainsbury's, London. Dr Carrie Ruxton writes for www.iminseason.com.

Why good taste will banish those cravings

I have been known when I'm stressed to reach for the chocolate. Initially, there's that total delight in the sheer delicious taste of it and then, 15 minutes later, my sugar levels come crashing down and I'm nearly asleep on the floor with exhaustion. Then I crave something savoury, such as a sausage roll or french fries, to take away the sweet taste. The inevitable migraine follows, which exacerbates my stress, and then I start to panic as I realise my body is out of control.

So what do I do? I now make sure



that in my car, at home and at work I've got certain things that will stop me 'using'. I keep ice-cold sour apples in the fridge – the amazing thing is that one bite gets rid of my

craving for chocolate immediately. I keep ready peeled and chopped-up crudites, which I dip into a dressing I make at weekends and takes me five minutes to do. Mix to taste – grapeseed oil, white balsamic vinegar and Dijon mustard. Then I add a sprinkling of my favourite dried herbs, mint or something with a kick in it.

I also keep shelled peas to pop in my mouth instead of sugary sweets, although if I want sweetness after dinner, Waitrose own-brand ice lollies that contain just fruit and water do the trick.

Whatever one's vice, a familiar pattern emerges with highs followed by debilitating lows that lead to the next 'hit' to get that feeling of wellbeing again.

This extra chomping often occurs when we are dehydrated and should really be glugging glasses of water. Often our food choices don't quite satisfy us, so we fall into the trap of eating more and more stuff packed with calories just to get the scrummy fatty, salty or sugary flavour. What are we looking for? Taste satisfaction.

I often roast a chicken and bake

some fish in silver foil with shallots, lime and a touch of garlic at the same time to eat cold during the week. The flavours are exquisite and it means I am never rushing home at night to start preparing my food from scratch when I'm starving hungry.

I believe the answer is to build up a 'vocabulary' of healthy tastes and flavour that will work for you and your family.

If you have good intentions you can find your own solution to the rubbish eating and drinking that brings you no satisfaction.