

BOTTLED WATER Full of Health or Full of Hype?

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(More information can be found at <http://foodfitnessbyphone.com>)

"Drink plenty of water" is a phrase indelibly imprinted on each of our minds, constantly reminding us of the necessity of this life-sustaining gift of nature. Gone are the days of filling up a canteen at the side of a pristine running stream, however. Clear plastic bottles sporting designer names and labels are most people's choice today.

In fact, the bottled water industry has become the fastest growing segment of the overall beverage industry. Sales have tripled in the last decade and now exceed over \$7 billion per year worldwide. Fifty-four percent of all Americans drink bottled water.

But is this often high-priced commodity really the best choice when it comes to fulfilling our daily H₂O quota? Or have over half the population fallen prey to yet another marketing extravaganza?

As a nutritional consultant, I have long been asked these questions. Unfortunately, there is not a simple yes or no answer. There are multiple factors to consider in order to make wise, informed decisions.

First, there are a few basic categories or types of bottled water available on the market today (see descriptions), each of which usually has one or another purported health benefits associated with it. Whether or not the health benefits associated with these types of water are valid or not, is the topic of much debate among health professionals with no definitive answers.

Regardless of any potential health benefits that may be associated with any given type of bottled water, the most important thing for people to know is that all brands are not created equal. Although, there are pure, high quality bottled waters available, discerning the good guys from the bad can be dicey business. Due to substandard and challenging government regulations, what it says on the label outside the bottle is not always what's inside.

For example, a study done by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) found that **an estimated 25% of bottled water tested is really just tap water in a bottle!**

In another example, last year 500,000 liters of Coca-Cola's Dasani brand water was recalled in Britain due to high levels of bromate, a carcinogenic chemical. Pathogens can also be a problem as the NDRC further reports that one-fifth of the bottled waters tested exceeded unenforceable state of industry bacteria guidelines.

Other concerns voiced by those in opposition to the proliferation of this industry include: the 1.5 million tons of plastic used for bottling and the toxic chemicals that can be released into the environment during this process; possible consumption of the toxic chemicals that may leach into the water from the plastic bottles in which the water is contained; and the enormous amount of resources expended in the overall production, packaging and transportation of bottled waters.

All things considered, in conjunction with the NDRC, I will continue to recommend water filtered at the source either through a quality in-home filtration system or one available at most natural food stores, as the safest and usually most economical overall drinking water for daily consumption.

Types of Bottled Water

The Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) product definitions for bottled water are:

Purified Water: Produced by distillation, deionization, reverse osmosis or other suitable processes.

Drinking Water: Water sold for human consumption in sanitary containers that contains no added sweeteners or chemical additives (other than flavors, extracts or essences that do not exceed one-percent-by-weight of the final product). Must be calorie-free and sugar-free.

Artesian Water/Artesian Well Water: Bottled water from a well in which water is tapped from a confined aquifer (permeable stratum of rock overlaid by impermeable rock).

Spring Water: Water that flows naturally to the earth's surface from an underground formation without the aid of drilling or pumps.

Mineral Water: Contains not less than 250 parts per million total dissolved solids (mineral and trace elements) collected naturally by passing through various layers of earth and rock to the well or spring. No minerals added.

Sparkling Water: Naturally carbonated water (i.e. contains the same amount of carbon dioxide that it had at emergence from the source, after treatment and possible replacement with carbon dioxide). Note: soda water, seltzer water and tonic water may contain sugar and calories and are considered soft drinks, not bottled water.

Bottled Water Testing

How does your favorite brand of water measure up? The National Resources Defense Council provides objective information on bottled water and has a study listing contaminants found in various brands. You can view the study at www.nrdc.org/water/drinking/bw/appa.asp

For a water analysis provided by leading bottlers, visit www.bottledwaterweb.com

Glossary of Labeling Terms

Reading the labels on bottled water can be wrought with confusion. Here's a list of some of the most commonly used terms to help sort things out:

Carbonation: saturation with carbon dioxide. Under pressure, the gas in water becomes carbonic acid.

Charcoal filter: device for removing dissolved gasses, such as chlorine, from purified water.

Deionized or Demineralized: process of reducing water to a non-mineral state by passing it over a bed of resins. Generally, deionized water is considered of higher quality than distilled water and is more economical to produce.

Distilled: purified by passing through an evaporation-condensation cycle that removes most dissolved solids (minerals).

Filtration: a naturally occurring or artificial process in which water passes through filters and is depleted of certain minerals and other elements.

Ionization: a process whereby ions are separated and/or exchanged.

Municipal water: water supplied by a city for public use, otherwise known as tap water.

Ozonization: a method of sanitizing water by using ozone which is made by forcing compressed air through a high voltage arc into the water.

Reverse osmosis: process by which water is reduced to a non-mineral state by passing through a plastic membrane under pressure, which separates the water from other elements.

Ultraviolet ray: invisible rays beyond the violet end of the visible spectrum used to kill pathogens.

Fruit and Vitamin Water

One of the growing trends in bottled water is fruit and vitamin-enhanced waters. They sound like an easy way to pack in more fruit and vitamins into your day, but they don't provide any true health benefits. The quality of these products is based on the quality of the water and the substances added. Consumers seem better off with a natural mineral water, than drinking isolated nutrients.

Fruit waters should not be considered as a substitute for drinking water. They are officially categorized as beverages by the FDA and should be treated accordingly. As with any beverages, sugar content should be taken into account. Keeping in mind that 4 grams = 1 teaspoon of sugar can be helpful when making wise choices.

Remember... investigating about the products/food you put in your body is never a bad thing to do. It's your health!