



# H<sub>2</sub>O

Drinking tap water costs less than a penny per glass. Yet, in 2012, Americans spent \$11.8 billion on bottled water—nearly 2,000 times the cost of tap water, according to the Beverage Marketing Corporation.

Story | ANGELA AMBROSE

Many consumers choose bottled water over tap because it's more convenient or they prefer the taste. Stores are packed with hundreds of bottled water choices—from spring and mineral to electrolyte and vitamin-infused fruit flavored water. But does fancy bottled water with pictures of pristine mountains and glaciers or brightly colored fruit offer added health benefits?

“Water is a healthy drink in itself; you don't need extra frills or add-ons—like additional flavors or vitamins added—to make it any healthier,” says Lilian Cheung, D.Sc., R.D., director of health promotion and communication at the Harvard School of Public Health's Department of Nutrition.

If you take a daily multivitamin, skip the expensive vitamin-enhanced waters. Drinks with added electrolytes are beneficial for

athletes who exercise in the heat or for more than an hour at a time, but are unnecessary for the casual exerciser.

“Water is an excellent calorie-free, sugar-free beverage choice,” Cheung says. “Many people enjoy it plain, though for some people who are accustomed to drinking sweet beverages, water can initially taste bland.” To enhance the flavor of water, she suggests adding citrus fruit,

ginger or cucumber slices or crushed fresh mint or berries.

“I drink bottled water because it's easy and convenient,” says Patty Martin, R.D., of Sugar Land Nutrition Therapy Center. “But the best thing to do is to drink filtered water.” Filtering tap water can improve flavor while removing impurities.

For people with serious health conditions or weakened immune systems, the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency recommends using a point-of-use filter that removes particles one micrometer or less in diameter to reduce the risk of microbial contaminants. When choosing bottled water, look for protected well and spring water sources that are treated using reverse osmosis, distillation or ultraviolet light.

For added safety, Martin suggests purchasing a reusable sport bottle that is free of BPA, which is short for Bisphenol A, a common chemical found in plastic. The Food and Drug Administration is evaluating the effects of BPA on the brain, prostate gland and on behavior in fetuses, infants and children.

“Avoiding plastic bottles may be healthier, not only for our bodies, but also the environment,” Cheung says. Consider eco-friendly reusable bottles made of aluminum, stainless steel or glass. ♣

## DID YOU KNOW?

Water is the most popular beverage in the United States. However, back in the 1980s and 1990s, sugar-sweetened sodas claimed the No. 1 spot. According to a Harvard Public Health study, soft drinks, fruit juices and sports beverages have been linked to 180,000 deaths worldwide related to diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Choosing water in place of sweetened drinks could save you money on your grocery and medical bills.