

Reasons to Avoid Bottled Water



An increase in water intake with an equal reduction in soda and juice is a practical way to improve overall health. To that end, many have turned to the daily consumption of bottled water believing it to be preferable to tap water. To the dismay of many bottled water drinkers, this largely unregulated industry leaves much to doubt about the safety, purity and value of bottled water. What's more, the environmental cost of manufacturing, packaging, transportation and disposal pose a risk greater than the high cost of the water itself.

Up to 25 to 30 percent of bottled water is actually municipal water, for instance Dasani water, is simply purified municipal water. In September of 2007 PepsiCo, owners of Aquafina, disclosed under consumer pressure that it too uses municipal water. The Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), an organization that performs extensive testing on municipal and bottled water reported that the bottled water industry is, "subject to less rigorous testing and purity standards than those which apply to city tap water." Case in point, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration softened rules for the industry allowing contamination of *E. coli* or other fecal coliform bacterium which is prohibited in tap water. Further more, the industry lacks requirements for bottled water to be free or even tested for parasites such as *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia*, both of which pose a health risk to the very young, immunocompromised and the elderly. Also, testing of bottled water is performed less frequently than that required for water from municipal sources.

Environmentally speaking, the use of bottled water touts a hefty carbon footprint due to the manufacture, transport and disposal of 22 billion petroleum based plastic bottles annually, as well as consuming large amounts of energy and generating toxic emissions in the process. Even though polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles can be recycled, most aren't, with millions finding their way to landfills every day. These little plastic, non-biodegradable monstrosities contain phthalate which is linked to birth defects in baby boys, reproductive problems and lowered sperm counts in males, negative effects on thyroid hormone synthesis and dysfunctions of the immune system.

Some environmental toxins from industry, agriculture and household waste routinely end up in our household water in spite of municipal water treatment systems. Fortunately, much of the remaining contaminants can be reduced with the use of an activated-carbon filter purchased from a home supply store. A family of four could spend one to two thousand dollars yearly on bottled water where as a home filter can be purchased and maintained for about one hundred annually.

Although there are areas to improve in the regulation and purification of municipal water, I believe the solution lies in reducing the environmental contamination of source water, improving standards, regulation and the technology involved in municipal water purification. Due to the exuberant cost of over a dollar a bottle compared to a few pennies for filtered tap water, the largely unregulated nature of the industry, and the environmental drawbacks of bottled water, consider using a filtration system or a reverse osmosis system to improve your health as well as that of the planet.