

The Truth About Bottled Water

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Imagine you've just been given a choice: You have to drink from one of two containers. One container is a cup from your own kitchen, and it contains a product that has passed strict state, federal and local guidelines for cleanliness and quality. Oh, and it's free. The second container comes from a manufacturing plant somewhere, and its contents—while seemingly identical to your first choice—have not been subjected to the same strict national and local standards. It costs approximately four times more than gasoline. These products both look and taste nearly identical.

Which do you choose?

If you chose beverage A, congratulations: You just saved yourself a whole lot of money, and, perhaps, even contaminants, too. But if you picked beverage B, then you'll be spending hundreds of unnecessary dollars on bottled water this year. Sure, bottled water is convenient, trendy, and may well be just as pure as what comes out of your tap. But it's hardly a smart investment for your pocketbook, your body or our planet. [Eat This, Not That!](#) decided to take a closer look at what's behind the pristine images and elegant-sounding names printed on those bottles.

You may actually be drinking tap water.

Case in point: Dasani, a Coca-Cola product. Despite its exotic-sounding name, Dasani is simply purified tap water that's had minerals added back in. For example, if your Dasani water was bottled at the Coca-Cola Bottling Company in Philadelphia, you're drinking Philly tap water. But it's not the only brand of water that relies on city pipes to provide its product. About 25 percent of all bottled water is taken from municipal water sources, including Pepsi's Aquafina.

Bottled water isn't always pure.

Scan the labels of the leading brands and you see variations on the words "pure" and "natural" and "pristine" over and over again. And when a Cornell University marketing class studied consumer perceptions of bottled water, they found that people thought it was cleaner, with less bacteria. But that may not actually be true. For example, in a 4-year review that included the testing of 1,000 bottles of water, the Natural Resources Defense Council—one the country's most ardent environmental crusaders—found that "about 22 percent of the brands we tested contained, in at least one sample, chemical contaminants at levels above strict state health limits."

It's not clear where the plastic container ends and the drink begins.

Turns out, when certain plastics are heated at a high temperature, chemicals from the plastics may leach into container's contents. So there's been a flurry of speculation recently as to whether the amounts of these chemicals are actually harmful, and whether this is even a concern when it comes to water bottles—which aren't likely to be placed in boiling water or even a microwave. While the jury is still out on realistic health ramifications, it seems that, yes, small amounts of chemicals from PET water bottles such as antimony—a semi-metal that's thought to be toxic in large doses—can accumulate the longer bottled water is stored in a hot environment. Which, of course, is probably a good reason to avoid storing bottled water in your garage for six months—or better yet, to just reach for tap instead.

Our country's high demand for oil isn't just due to long commutes.

Most water bottles are composed of a plastic called polyethylene terephthalate (PET). Now, to make PET, you need crude oil. Specifically, 17 million barrels of oil are used in the production of PET water bottles every year, estimate University of Louisville scientists. No wonder the per ounce cost of bottled water rivals that of gasoline. What's more, 86 percent of 30 billion PET water bottles sold annually are tossed in the trash, instead of being recycled, according to data from the Container Recycling Institute. That's a lot of waste—waste that will outlive you, your children, and your children's children. You see, PET bottles take 400 to 1000 years to degrade. Which begs the question: If our current rate of consumption continues, where will we put all of this discarded plastic?

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