

What's all the fuss about...Bottled Water?

Is it really that much better than tap? Really? Why? **BBC**

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Water, water, everywhere - how do I choose?

Good question. There are now around 1000 brands of bottled-water world-wide - over 250 in the UK alone. Spring rains from Jordan, glacial flows from Canada, carbonated from France. All hock basically the same product.

So which should I buy?

Well, there are three types of bottled. In order of quality: "mineral", "spring" and "purified". "Only natural mineral water is entirely natural, without treatment, and has had nothing done to it," says Jo Jacobius, Director of the [Natural Mineral Water Information Service](#). "It is bottled at source and must display the typical mineral analysis on the label."

But 'spring water' sounds so delish

Spring water is essentially the same as mineral, only it can be treated to make it drinkable - although this must be declared on the label. Nothing can be added though, except carbon dioxide.

Hmmm, I prefer fizzy.

The correct water-expert term is "sparkle".

Sorry. What about purified?

Avoid. 'Purified', or 'processed' water is usually just tap-water, industrially processed to remove nasties and improve taste. To water-aficionados, this kind of water is "dead". It's been stripped of all the microscopic trace elements and metals which give health benefits and flavour. In fact, they have to be artificially added later.

Artificial water?

A famous example is Coca-Cola company's ill-fated Dasani water. It was pulled from the UK market after a series of revelations about its quality, including that it came from a tap somewhere in Sidcup, Kent. The bottles are now collectors' items on eBay.

Is tap water really that bad?

No. According to [Drinking Water Inspectorate](#), 99.86% of UK tap water is 'acceptable quality'.

'Acceptable quality'? That sounds appertising.

"From a health point of view," they say, "there's absolutely no difference between bottled water and tap water. If you put two in the fridge in separate jugs, you wouldn't be able to taste the difference."

Fridge? Surely 'serve at room temperature'?

Slightly chilled, actually, is the way it's served in top restaurants. Letting tap water stand is an age old trick to make it more tasty. The chlorine evaporates, you see.

So, what do the celebs drink?

Well, Cameron Diaz and Julia Roberts favour [Penta H2O](#) and its "unique molecular structure". [FijiWater](#), bottled in a virgin island ecosystem thousands of miles from civilisation, rehydrates P.Diddy, Halle Berry, and Mary J Blige. And no prizes for guessing who quaffs spiritually-enhanced "living water" Kabbalah Mountain Spring at around £2.50 a litre.

Water - what is it good for?

Absolutely everything. "Just two small changes in our diet can make a dramatic difference to our health," says nutritional physician and author, Dr John Briffa. "Eating more fruit and vegetables and drinking more natural mineral water"

Drinking 2 litres (8 glasses) a day improves well being, kills headaches, boosts energy levels, and reduces risk of certain cancers. Your hair, nails and skin are also likely to look a lot better.

Why bother with a premium water though?

Tastes better, with a better mouth-feel and no after-taste. It'll also contain more trace elements vital to health. A solid level of calcium, around 100mg, for example, can be good for bones and warding off osteoporosis. Low sodium and magnesium (under 10 milligrams) can reduce heart problems. Silica in some waters is important for healthy skin and hair. "And," adds John Gilmour, chairman of Fijiwater, a hydrophile who drinks pints of the stuff everyday, "I haven't had a hangover in three years!"

Sold!

In fact, these general benefits have been exploited to create a growing range of "aquaceuticals".

I've heard it all now

Danone Activ is an obvious one. It's calcium-enhanced for shiny teeth and bones. And there's also Contrex, the "slimming water" from Nestle.

Slimming water?

"Rich in calcium and magnesium, this still water is an integral part of a balanced diet, particularly for those trying to control their weight" reads the Contrex website. However, Amanda Wynne of the British Dietetic Association disagrees. "Drinking water will not make you slim," she says. "It just doesn't work that way."

What about 'power water'?

Good question. A new range of water offers increased energy levels. At the top end, Penta H2O is "ultra-purified restructured oxygenated functional water". Science bit: its smaller water molecules allow it to be absorbed more readily into the body, thus enhancing the performance of long-distance runners and other athletes who drink it. At Olympic level, a sloshing stomach can mean the difference between gold and bronze.

What do chef's drink?

Drink? They don't drink it, darling. They cook with it. "A lot of top chefs like Charlie Trotter and Jean-Georges Vongerichten are now saying 'Hey water is part of the effect I'm creating'," says David Gilmour, chairman of Fijiwater. "You don't select nine beautifully chosen ingredients and then use one shabby one."

Make sense.

Also, in restaurants, water doesn't just refresh the palate and provoke pre-meal fizzy-vs-still debates. It can also defuse the intoxicating effects of alcohol, so you eat, drink and spend more. For this reason, many top restaurants now "freepour" high quality mineral water for their guests.

Then I shall do the same at my table

Good idea. Up to 60% of people are dehydrated most of the time. This is even though we drink 2 billion litres of bottled water a year in the UK alone, spending £847 million in the process. However, how much NHS money is spent treating back injuries from lugging family-sized Evian cartons out of car boots has not been recorded.