

The Truth Behind Bottled Water Claims

10 Sketchy "Enhanced" Waters—Exposed!

Sports drinks, electrolyte-enhanced water, coconut juice and more: What's worth it, and what's a ripoff?

By Stephanie Castillo



Flavored-Water Fail

Drinking plain old water can be a bit of a snoozefest, especially if you're getting your recommended daily amount of at least eight large glasses a day. But if your ennui is leading you to load up on seemingly healthy bottled-water alternatives, you need to read this first.

"In general, we have no evidence that water can be improved," says *Prevention's* nutrition advisor David Katz, MD, MPH, an associate professor adjunct in public health at Yale

University's School of Medicine. "There is no convincing evidence of benefit from any version of 'enhanced' water."

In general, he says, "we consider a beverage 'water' if it has no calories, no sodium (or trivial amounts in mineral water), and no sweetener (sugar, alternative, or artificial). If a product is sweetened, it's not water—it's a soda."

Here's what you need to know *before* you glug your next jug of fancy water.



Coconut Water

Dubbed "mother nature's sport drink," coconut water's high levels of potassium, sodium, and antioxidants make it seem like the ultimate post-sweat swig. But just last year, scientists at ConsumerLab.com took several brands of coconut water to the lab and tested them to be sure. Their findings? Only one brand actually contained the amount of sodium and potassium claimed on its nutritional label.

Assuming the label *is* telling the truth, coconut water is a decent choice for after a light workout, but it's not a good call after intense ones because it doesn't contain enough sodium, according to a recent study presented at the 244th National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society.



Waters Enhanced With Vitamins

Sure, some of these beverages have vitamins in them, but with up to 200 calories and 33 g of sugar per bottle, you're better off thinking of these drinks as soda.

What's more, says Ara DerMarderosian, PhD, a pharmacognosy professor at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, waters that are heavily fortified with vitamins and minerals may actually suppress your immune system if you're already taking in enough vitamins and minerals through your diet.

If you want a little zing in your water, try Ayala's Hint, Metromint, or Wateroos. Each bottle is free of sugar, sweeteners, preservatives, and calories.



Electrolyte Water

Smart Water is distilled (which means it's boiled and then recondensed from the steam to kill microbes and remove minerals) and enhanced with potassium, magnesium, and calcium. According to the company's website, it also "one-ups ma nature by adding in electrolytes for faster hydration."

But there's no real evidence of there being a benefit to adding electrolytes to a hydration formula, says Dr. Katz, unless you're intensely exerting yourself in blazing heat and eating isn't an option. "Under other circumstances, water in its native state will do just fine."



Sleep-Inducing Water

Dream Water infuses its drink with three natural sleep ingredients: GABA (to help relax), melatonin (to help induce sleep), and 5-HTP (to help improve the quality of sleep). The brand claims to be "the first all-natural sleep enhancer with zero calories, no preservatives and natural active ingredients that helps you relax and fall asleep," and it's available in three flavors—Snoozeberry, Lullaby Lemon, and Pineapple PM.

Should you drink the stuff? "It's intended to help with relaxation and sleep, and does contain ingredients that might support this, which makes it really a 'tonic' or 'functional' drink," says Dr. Katz. In other words, it's more herbal supplement than it is water. As for whether it actually helps with sleep, well, the jury's still out on that one, but anyone who's chugged liquid before bed knows how *that* can go.



OWater

Each option available from OWater—sweetened, unsweetened, and sport—is advertised as gluten-free. Since gluten is a protein found in grains like *wheat*, we hardly think this is something worth touting on the label. If that doesn't raise a red flag, this might: Their plain version is sweetened with sugar, and they fuse their H₂O with electrolytes—an ingredient Dr. Katz says isn't necessary when working out.



Plain Bottled Water

As if shelling out for an overpriced bottle of H₂O isn't troublesome enough, keep in mind that you're also paying for something you definitely *don't* want: BPA. Plastics are made with BPA—a hormone-disrupting chemical that's been linked to increased risk of heart disease and obesity—which means your bottled water is swimming with the chemical, too.

And then, of course, there's the issue of where the water actually comes from. In 2007, after receiving pressure from the nonprofit group Corporate Accountability International, Pepsi's Aquafina confessed their true source of water was filtered tap—*not* a mountain spring as they'd claimed.



Artificially-Sweetened Water

Sure, Fruit2O sounds pretty great on the website—"crystal clear water with the delightful flavor of fruit"—but not so fast: That fruit flavor is really artificial sweetener, says Dr. Katz. In other words, it's more "soda" than water.

Why that's a problem: Taste buds can't distinguish real sugar from artificial sweeteners and consuming either will result in a sweet tooth, he says. "So while these 'sodas' don't have calories, they will likely increase intake in sugar and calories in other foods. Real water doesn't do that!"



Workout Water

Propel Zero offers its drinkers nine refreshing flavors packed with vitamins C, E & B and antioxidants. This way, they can "replenish, energize, and protect with zero calories and no added color."

But what they lack in calories and color, they make up for in artificial sweetener and significant amounts of sodium. "There is no evidence that adding miscellaneous nutrients to water confers any benefits. So I would not drink this," says Dr. Katz.



Black Water

Blk. Spring Water—we promise that's not a typo—is a "proprietary fulvic and humic acid electrolyte drink, or a natural organic complex blend of over 77 macro and micro trace minerals and electrolytes." Huh?

Electrolytes are unnecessary, but how about everything else? "As far as I can tell, it's just spring water with fulvic acid. I don't know if it offers real benefits, but drinking water that is black might be fun just for the novelty of it," says Dr. Katz.

Yet, if you're willing to shell out for bottled water, why not choose a seltzer instead? "When your taste buds want more entertainment, I recommend sparkling water flavored with fruit essences, like the brand Polar's seltzers," says Dr. Katz.



Life Water

When looking at SoBe Lifewater and SoBe 0 Calorie Lifewater labels, we noticed three unnecessary—and not exactly healthy—ingredients: coconut water, artificial sweeteners and antioxidants. Not to mention that their orange tangerine flavor is achieved by adding modified food starch, something that could cause a problem for those who are gluten-intolerant.

Bottom line: Mother Nature knew what she was doing when she created water. "Variations on the theme are fine, but you may not get real bang for the buck," says Dr. Katz. "And if it contains any kind of sweetener, it's not water—no matter what they call it."

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