

# Should you hit the bottle?



Prima nutritionist **Fiona Hunter** investigates the latest hot topics. This month, it's mineral water

**B**ottled water is, on average, 1000 times more expensive than the stuff we get out of the tap, yet sales have increased six-fold over the last ten years. So are we right to be so fussy?

## What's in our tap water?

A common complaint about tap water is the taste, which is usually chlorine, added in minute quantities to kill any bacteria. But if you allow the water to stand in a glass for a while first, some of the chlorine will evaporate.

More seriously, chlorine and aluminium, also present in tap water, have been linked with bladder cancer and Alzheimer's disease, according to nutrition expert Dr John Briffa, who only drinks mineral water. However, water boards are making big efforts to ensure that tap-water quality meets with the stringent EC regulations.

In 2002, we started drinking bottled water when scare stories hit the headlines that traces of hormones from women taking the contraceptive pill were polluting drinking water, but most scientists believe concerns are unfounded. Most nutritionists, myself included, are more concerned with quantity rather than quality of water – drink one and a half litres every day, whether it's from the tap or the hills.

### What's so special about mineral water?

Although natural mineral waters do contain several important minerals, they don't contribute huge amounts of these nutrients to our diet. The exception to this is brands that have a high calcium content:

- SAN PELLEGRINO** 208mg per litre
- BADOIT** 190mg per litre
- ASHE PARKE** 122 mg per litre
- VITTEL** 91mg per litre

**Health or hype?** The mineral-water market is flooded, but we've picked out a few of the newest bottled waters on the block, to look at their remarkable health claims.

THE WATER	THE CLAIM	THE REALITY
Oxygenated water, eg Active O2 (£1.38, 500ml, health food shops)	It helps you to exercise harder and for longer.	A recent study concluded that drinking oxygenated water before exercising did nothing to enhance athletic performance.
Restructured water, eg Penta Water (£1.69, 1 litre, Waitrose or visit <a href="http://www.teampenta.co.uk">www.teampenta.co.uk</a> )	It can be absorbed into the body more quickly for faster rehydration.	Although the water is endorsed by several athletes and drunk by celebrities, such as Cameron Diaz, leading sports nutrition experts say tap water is just as good.
Calcium-enriched water, eg Contrex (49p, 1 litre, Sainsbury's and Tesco)	Helps to rid the body of toxins that change metabolic rate.	While the theory that toxins cause the metabolic rate to slow down has not been proven, a number of studies show that a good calcium intake can aid weight loss.
Fiji Natural Mineral Water (£1.25, 1 litre, Waitrose and specialist food shops)	It helps reduce premature ageing due to its high silica content.	Silica has amazing anti-ageing properties: it increases skin elasticity, repairs brittle nails and helps the skin store moisture. Drinking this water will up your silica intake.

## Is bottled water money down the drain?

### Tap water

- May contain traces of chemicals, such as chlorine and aluminium, which some experts believe may be linked with health problems.
- Must be processed to make it safe to drink.
- Cost is covered by your water rates.
- The taste and mineral content of your tap water depends on the part of the country in which you live. In areas such as the Isle of Man or around Exmoor, where the water is very soft, it will taste different from London, for instance, where the water is very hard.
- To find out about the quality of your water, call 020 7082 8024 or visit [www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk).

### Natural mineral water

- Must be untreated.
- Must be of known and consistent quality with a composition that is stable over time (the label carries the typical mineral analysis).
- Contains no additives except, in some cases, carbon dioxide to carbonate the water.
- Usually costs between 50p and £1 per litre.
- Beware of impostors – 'spring water' is not the same, as it may be chemically processed. 'Table water' is often just distilled tap water.
- It's convenient on the go and even comes in child-friendly bottles, such as Highland Spring Natural Mineral Water For Kids sports bottles.