

WELLBEING

Water Works

Can you tell spring from mineral or table from tap? While sales of bottled water are soaring, few of us actually know what we are buying, so it's time to get wise about your H₂O

Ensuring we drink enough water is a simple step we can all take to improve our general health and wellbeing. But is it best to turn on the tap or shell out for bottles?

Over the past 15 years, sales of bottled water in the UK have soared from 406 million litres in 1990 to 1,997 million litres in 2014 – an annual spend of £2billion.

However, few of us know exactly what we are buying and we are often just swallowing the belief that “bottled is better”. Yet in some cases, this is simply not true. Not all bottled waters are the same and it makes sense to look carefully at the labelling before you buy. Our guide to the different varieties on offer will help you decide which one works for you:

Natural mineral water Your first choice when buying bottled water, this is groundwater that landed as rain. Stringently regulated, it has to be bottled at a single protected source that is free from pollution and continuously analysed to ensure that it is filtered as it seeps through rocks, leaving it clean, pure and pollution-free.

In the US, it should contain no less than 250 parts per million of total dissolved solid minerals and trace elements and no minerals can be added. However, in the UK, it does not have to have an exceptionally high quantity of minerals to be called “mineral water” – in fact, some have similar levels to those of tap water. Opt for brands such as Vichy, Ramlösa, San Pellegrino, Badoit, Perrier and Ballygowan, however, and you can get up to a third of your required daily calcium and magnesium intake from a two-litre bottle.

Do check the sodium content, though, as some mineral waters have high levels of sodium, which has been linked to high blood pressure. Anyone who suffers from hypertension should avoid drinking mineral waters with sodium levels of more than 20mg per litre.



nutritionist Jane Clarke – handy if you want to meet your quota of eight glasses a day.

Spring water This comes from a single underground source but bottlers are permitted to treat it to get rid of impurities, either by filtration or the use of chemicals.

Table water This can be bottled from more than one source – even from a tap.

UNCHARTED WATERS

Recently, a new generation of flavoured and functional “waters” have sprung up, including coconut, birch, maple and even charcoal water. These are all categorised as soft drinks and should not be confused with water simply because the word appears in their name – as soon as manufacturers add minerals, carbohydrates, vitamins, flavourings or sweeteners, it becomes a soft drink.

While some waters are healthy options, others are not and can contain high levels of sugars to make them taste appealing. While fine as an occasional treat, before you start guzzling, check out the ingredients as anything featuring sugar, sucrose, fructose, glucose or dextrose should be avoided.

If you baulk at the idea of paying for bottled water, or are concerned about the environmental impact of the packaging, consider investing in a water filter to make

your tap water more palatable. The taste of tap water varies greatly in the UK, depending on whether you live in a hard or soft-water area. Using a filter can work out 1,000 times cheaper than buying bottled mineral water. While jug carbon filters remove chlorine, fertilisers and pesticides from tap water, they don't reduce bacteria or microbes.

Once filtered, drink within a day to avoid bacteria build-up. The same is true of opened bottles of mineral water, which can colonise bacteria if left in the fridge for more than a week. **✚**

Naturally sparkling mineral water In addition to having to meet the same strict criteria as natural mineral water, to be labelled “naturally sparkling”, the water must come from a spring with sufficient quantities of carbon dioxide present to supply the fizz.

Most sparkling mineral waters are artificially carbonated during the bottling process – and contrary to myth, this does not leech minerals from your body or cause cellulite. “Sparkling water poses no threat to health and provides a refreshing difference to still water,” says

FAVOURITE FILTERS

Filter jugs, on-the-go bottles and charcoal-stick containers can all improve the taste of your tap water and get rid of any pesticide or fertiliser residues. Just remember to change your filter regularly and to drink within a day of filtering.



➤ **Boots Premium Water Filter Jug**, £14.99, a great value-for-money option

➤ **Bobble Filter Jug**, £16, from Tesco



➤ **Brita Marella**, 2.4l, £22



➤ **Black Blum Eau Good Water Purifier**, £14.95, visit black-blum.com. Contains a water-filtering charcoal stick



