

Washed Out!

Bottled waters aren't created equal. In fact, the H₂O in your water cooler can be draining you of essential minerals. Experts weigh-in on how your water can be affecting your health.

By Rachel Naud

Joanne Holt thought she was doing everything right when it came to her health. The 46-year-old personal trainer worked out regularly, had healthy eating habits and took recommended doses of vitamin C, D and B, in addition to magnesium and fish oil. So why did she feel so run down?

"I felt depleted," she says. "And I wasn't sleeping well, either."

Turns out, Holt was drinking the wrong water.

Like many Winnipeggers, Holt was purchasing bottled distilled water from a major water supplier in the city thinking it was a healthier option than tap water. What she didn't realize was that her water was stripped of trace minerals such as calcium and magnesium, and, in turn, was putting her health at risk.

WHAT'S IN – OR OUT – OF OUR WATER

North Americans have adopted the culture of drinking bottled water as a healthier way of living. It's this notion that the bottled variety is superior to that of tap water that has grown the bottled water business to a tune of \$5.7 billion US. And although, in many cases, this is true, what many Canadians don't know is that not all bottled water is created equal.

Many companies use reverse osmosis or distillation processes to remove lead and other contaminants to make tap water drinkable. However, in doing this, almost all of the water's minerals are stripped away. What this means? Drinking it can cause more harm than good to your body.

In fact, according to the World Health Organization, drinking low-mineral water can lead to major health risks including coronary heart disease, gastric ulcers and complications with pregnancy such as newborns afflicted with jaundice, anemia and even growth disorders.

This is why in its "Guidelines for Drinking Water," the World Health Organization recommends drinking water that contains a moderate mineral profile of at least 250 parts per million.

MUST-HAVE MINERALS

"Having minerals in our water helps our body function," says Wanda Andrews, nutritionist and owner of Nutritional Sciences in Winnipeg. "They give us energy, help us heal and support healthy immunity growth."

Andrews says minerals, such as calcium, are especially important for women going through hormonal changes associated with menstruation, pregnancy and menopause.

"Women have more issues with calcium absorption because of hormonal changes," she says. "During menopause, women also have higher cholesterol levels, and drinking water with fibre such as flax or psyllium husks can bring cholesterol levels down and act as a preventative to reduce cardiovascular disease."

Moreover, magnesium, according to the World Health Organization, helps maintain normal muscle and nerve function, keeps heart rhythm steady, supports a healthy immune system, and keeps bones strong.

And although these minerals can be found in the foods we eat, as well as in supplements, by drinking de-mineralized water, the benefits of doing so can be, well, washed away.

PUT SOME SPRING IN YOUR WATER

When searching for a mineral-rich water, look for the term 'spring water' on the label.

Spring water is defined by the Canadian Bottle Association as natural water which is collected from an underground source and is characterized by its purity at the source, its content of minerals and trace elements, including magnesium, calcium and potassium. According to The World Health Organization, the incidence of osteoporosis and heart diseases might be notably reduced by drinking waters with reasonable concentrations of magnesium and calcium. However, the consumption of spring waters with high content of sodium may induce hypertension in some populations.

This is why Chris Garrick, owner of Jackson

Springs Natural Premium Spring Water in Winnipeg, ensures his bottled spring water is sodium and fluoride free.

The water, which is sourced from an artesian spring located in the Sandilands Provincial Forest, southeast of Winnipeg, contains five times more magnesium and four times more calcium than any other bottled water in North America, and has also been awarded the Gold Medal by the Prestigious Berkeley Springs International Water Tasting as the "Best Tasting Water" in the world.

"We're all about natural water," says Garrick. "We take precautions to ensure our water is safe and includes healthy minerals. It's the minerals that contribute to the taste and that's what we're known for."

It's the refreshing and smooth taste that has Holt's whole family hooked on Jackson Springs Water – including the dog. "We are drinking so much more water than before," she says. "I have my energy back and after I work out, I don't feel like I've hit a brick wall anymore. And what I wasn't expecting was the compliments I get now. People tell me my skin is much softer and clearer. So now I look as good as I feel."

