

# The Truth About Bottled Water

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As the Florida weather heats up, many look to water to keep cool. Water is still the best choice of drink to keep the body properly hydrated year-round. Although water does not have any real significant nutritional value, it is essential for our survival. The body needs at least eight, 8-ounce glasses a day for daily functions (blood, digestion, temperature and more).

But the question often arises, "Is bottled water better for you than water from the tap?" Many people believe that bottled water is cleaner, safer and healthier. Advertising may lead you to believe it is so, but the answer is, "No." It is more a matter of aesthetics. Many people say they prefer the taste of bottled water.

Florida water is generally very hard—harder in some areas of the state than others. The hardness affects the taste and takes a toll on water heaters, coffee makers, etc. Sulfur and iron can also affect the taste but generally do not create a health issue. Bottled water is lower in minerals and salt.

Just because bottled water may taste better does not mean that it is any safer to drink. Water that comes into your home from a public water supply must be tested regularly and meet certain state and federal public drinking water standards (chemicals, bacteria, mineral and inorganic compounds). Many scientists have done studies that compare tap water to bottled water and consistently found no difference. They looked for contaminants, such as e. coli bacteria, that could make you sick.

One thing for sure—it is expensive—100-500 times more than the water out of your tap. Bottled water is a 10-billion-dollar business in the U.S. (2005). It all started with Perrier taking the lead in bottled water sales across the world; but now, Evian has taken over and prices are about \$5 a gallon! Both companies started in France. Many other popular brands include Aquafina (by Pepsi—#1 in U.S.), Dasani (by Coca-Cola—#2 in U.S.) and other new brands. Many are now available in vending machines that include sodas at an average cost of \$1 per bottle. It has become the fastest growing segment of America's beverage business. In restaurants, a single bottle can cost up to \$5.

Bottled water sales have grown 81% (1998-2003) and is now the fifth best-selling beverage in the U.S.A. There is a new market developing in the U.S.A. that is called "value-added waters," claiming to stimulate metabolism, enhance memory, reduce stress, boost immunity, promote well-being, and more). Look

closely at the label. Although the pictures may lead you to think that they come from special mountain streams, springs or wells, in most cases bottled "drinking water" is just reprocessed tap water.

Florida has become a good source for the bottled water industry—from the Suwannee River to our own nearby Zephyrhills Springs. There are over 60 companies. The Division of Food Safety is the agency responsible for monitoring the water companies, testing bottled water to make sure it is safe, and inspecting bottling facilities for sanitation. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services ensures that the water comes from an "approved source" (has the proper approval from the water management district to withdraw the water), but about 25% of bottled waters from the U.S. are just bottled waters from municipal water supplies, like your tap water, and must be labeled as such. Tap water that is further processed and treated can be labeled "distilled" or "purified."

The truth is...if you are buying bottled water because you think it is better, safer, or healthier, you have probably been misled by all those expensive advertisements. The biggest difference is just cost.

## WARNINGS:

If the carbon filters used in most self-serve machines (and on home systems and in some new refrigerators) are not replaced regularly, they will contaminate the water with bacteria.

If containers are reused to fill with water, they must be clean. Do not use milk jugs. Two-liter soda bottles are safer and easier to carry. Bleach jugs are even better, but again, all containers must be cleaned thoroughly.

When you stock up for hurricane season, be sure to use before the next year. Even bottled water has a shelf life (refer to the date on the bottle).

When drinking out of a personal bottle of water, never refill more than once.

A final consideration before choosing bottled water over tap water is the detrimental impact to the environment when the empty bottles are not recycled and end up in the landfills. Statistics show only one out of every ten are recycled.