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Enhanced Water

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HEALTHY CHOICES

Some bottled waters offer health benefits beyond mere hydration.

Enhanced Water

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Beware of the sugar levels of some bottled water.



Water is critical for life. Bottled water has become a key component of the beverage market, with the average American consuming 31 gallons a year. Sale of bottled water in the U.S. has reached \$12 billion annually. Beverage companies have created a whole new category of bottled waters, and claim health benefits for the water beyond mere hydration. Most enhanced bottled water is made by PepsiCo Inc. and The Coca Cola Company, and is marketed as a healthy alternative to soda for adults who know they should be drinking more water. Choose wisely, since a bottle of GLACÉAU vitaminwater contains 33 grams of sugar, making it more akin to a soft drink than to a healthy beverage.

Enhanced water may contain a variety of ingredients, ranging from vitamins and minerals to natural or artificial flavors and other enhancements. A few of the waters, such as SoBe Lifewater, contain sugar, providing 40-50 calories per 8 oz. serving. Some utilize artificial sweeteners to cut down on calories. Other water beverages are enhanced with herbs and/or antioxidants.

Examples of substances added to the formulations include taurine for improved physical performance, B vitamins for stress reduction, zinc for enhanced immunity, ginseng for improved mental alertness, and certain flavors of superfruits, like acai, goji and pomegranate, to provide antioxidant protection. Most of these substances do not provide the health benefits claimed for them.

Smartwater is distilled water with small amounts of added electrolytes, such as magnesium, calcium and potassium salts. With fewer calories than soda, the company states that the drink both hydrates consumers and provides nutrients they are likely to be missing. Fruitwater is sparkling water with zero calories and comes in five light, fruity flavors. Aside from natural flavor, fruitwater does not contain any actual fruit juice.



Some of the beverages contain either caffeine or the natural stimulant guarana, an herb rich in caffeine. With names like Propel, Energy, Awaken, Energize Your Life, Refresh & Revive, they all convey the message that they can give a person a real lift, a surge of energy. Those drinks provide the consumer with the same buzz experienced by a cup of coffee.

While the enhanced waters contribute to our daily fluid needs, they do not provide much in the way of nutrition. Consumers increasingly are choosing these flavored, bottled waters instead of soft drinks, since they have fewer calories and consider them to be healthier. Be alert, since they may not deliver the health benefits they promise: relaxation, energy boost, improved immunity and endurance.

For some people, bottled water has become a fashion statement. The enhanced waters are essentially lighter alternatives to the energy or sports beverages, but cost substantially more than regular bottled water. One could add a drop of lemon or a mint sprig to filtered water to provide a nice flavor and make water more enjoyable. Remember to carefully recycle the plastic bottles to minimize the environmental impact of the empty plastic bottles.

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