

Watch What You Drink

I believe it is essential that we drink filtered water, not regular tap water.

Q. I have read that we should not drink tap water. If this is true, then what do you believe is the best water to drink?
□—F.G., Lima, N.Y.

tap water contains chlorine. Chlorine kills bacteria in water except for a few resistant parasites. Chlorine, however, also can destroy vitamins A, B, C and E, which are some of the main antioxidants that protect us from cancer and heart disease.

When chlorine reacts with organic waste it can form the chemical trihalomethanes, which is a carcinogen. In other words, it is possible for cancer, especially of the colon and bladder, to form as a result of the continued ingestion of water that contains trihalomethanes. Chlorine reacting with organic materials in water also may increase one's risk of developing allergies, asthma, kidney stones and atherosclerosis.

The tap water you or I use to fill a glass from the kitchen faucet is the same water used to keep our lawns healthy, wash our clothes and flush our toilets. Certainly the very idea of drinking from a tap the same water that is in the toilet makes the point clear. Beyond that, tap water also can contain chemicals from the air, as well as industrial waste, pesticides, heavy metals, fertilizers, petroleum products, parasites, animal waste, bacteria, viruses and more.

I believe it is essential that we drink filtered water, not regular tap water. Some of the best filters for this are the “reverse osmosis” type with “activated carbon filtration.”

These filters can remove chlorine, chloride, bacteria, parasites, chemicals, heavy metals—including lead and mercury—and eliminate radium, uranium, strontium 90, pesticides and more. The activated carbon filtration is able to eliminate nitrates and trihalomethanes.

If you find that you cannot afford the reverse-osmosis system with activated carbon filtration (a typical one costs \$300-\$400), then a more affordable option is a granulated carbon-block filter or a solid carbon-block filter. The granulated filters are effective for about three to four months before they need to be replaced, and the solid-block filters last about a year.

These keep out almost all micro-organisms, as well as chlorine, 98 percent of lead, and 85 percent of mercury and most other organic chemicals. Keep in mind, however, that these filters need to be changed periodically.

A water distiller with a carbon filter on top is also an excellent filtration system. A plain distiller—one without the carbon filter on top—will not remove the trihalomethanes and the other volatile organic chemicals.

Q.I want to add more water to my diet, but how much should I drink each day? Also, do my favorite drinks—coffee, tea and soda—count toward my daily water intake?

—M.B., Anaheim, Calif.

A.I believe water is probably the most important nutrient that our bodies need on a daily basis. Our blood is 82 percent water, and the human brain is 75 percent water. Inadequate water intake usually will cause mild dehydration, which many times is the first stage of chronic degenerative disease.

You need to drink approximately 2 quarts of water per day. To better determine the amount of water your body needs, simply divide your body weight (in pounds) by two.

That amount equals the number of ounces of water you should drink each day. Therefore, as an example, if you weigh 200 pounds, then you need 100 ounces of water a day.

Coffee, tea and sodas are caffeinated beverages. Caffeine is a diuretic and causes you to lose water—just the opposite of what you want to accomplish. Also, drinking these beverages over time will contribute to mild dehydration and will cause an addiction to caffeine.

Beneficial foods with high concentrations of water include fruits and vegetables. Bananas, for example, are more than 70 percent water, apples are 80 percent water, tomatoes are 95 percent water, and watermelon is more than 95 percent water.

Starches, fats and proteins have very little water. If these foods make up your main diet, then you will need to drink much more water.