

The Daily Union Article
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Title: Bottled Water Facts

Bottled water sales have skyrocketed in recent years. In 2016, bottled water became the number one beverage choice with soda coming in second place. In 2017, the trend continued reaching 13.7 billion gallons consumed. The total last year was over 18 billion gallons, leaving carbonated soft drinks further behind. This equates to an average of 42 gallons of bottled water per person per year in the United States!

What has motivated this significant shift in popularity? Several factors have led to the consumer push for bottled water: convenience, taste, and/or perceived health benefits, to name a few! Consumers are also seeing and hearing more advertisements and marketing campaigns that show clean and fresh mountain springs, clear and unspoiled glaciers further spurring the public perception that bottled water is “purer” and “healthier” than tap water. Consumers tend to drink bottled water because they assume that it is safer than municipal tap water.

However, the truth is that bottled water in the United States may or may not live up to these perceptions. Most bottled water from the United States comes from municipal water supplies – the same water that comes from the tap in our homes.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sets water quality standards for bottled water because it is considered a food. These quality standards, though, are less stringent than those governing local water treatment plants, which are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In an April 2019 Consumer Reports news release, the consumer advocacy group reported that the FDA has known about high arsenic levels in (a popular brand) bottled water since 2013. It was only because of public scrutiny that the production company that bottled and sold it finally pulled the brand off the market in June 2019.

Bottled water is significantly more expensive than tap water – both at the cash register and with our environment. You would need to drink over four 16.9oz bottles of water to meet the recommended daily fluid requirement (10 cups). The range in retail cost for a 16.9oz bottle of water starts at about \$.10 for a store brand to \$1.75 or more for a name brand. Using \$.99 per bottle as the average, a consumer would spend \$1,698.35 in bottled water each year to meet the daily recommended amount of fluid. The Earth Policy Institute estimates that bottled water costs as much as 10,000 times as much as tap water – or \$10 more per gallon than the price of gasoline!

That was the tough news. The good news is – the United States has the Safe Drinking Water Act to ensure that our municipal water entities provide an annual report to customers on contaminants in their drinking water. Typically, the annual water quality report is distributed by your municipality in your July water bill. You can also ask your local municipality for this report, called the Consumer Confidence Report.

If you have a private water source such as a well, you are responsible for getting your water tested to ensure it is safe. It is recommended that you test your well water annually to check for total coliform, bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels. Newer wells, or ones that have you have needed to make repairs on, are even more important to have tested.

Where can you get your water tested? You can purchase kits online, at a hardware store, or in the hardware section of larger discount stores as a few examples. The Geary County K-State Research & Extension office has free kits available to the public. You can pick one up at 119 E. 9th street between 8 am and 5 pm Monday-Friday. Follow the directions that comes with the kit based on which test you are requesting. You can mail the sample to the company. A water analysis fee (ranging from \$12 to \$79) will apply.

Keep in mind that the municipal water supply has much more rigorous standards than what water bottling companies are required to follow. This fact, combined with the cost savings over bottled water, should help raise your confidence in drinking more tap water.

Drinking the recommended daily intake of water will keep your body hydrated. Why is that important? Water has many important roles in our health and well-being:

- 1) Water is present in all tissue in our body. Our blood is comprised of 92% water; muscles are 75% water; our brain is 75% water; and even our bones are 25% water.
- 2) Water regulates body temperature. When you get too hot, your body will sweat. Sweating allows your body to lower its temperature.
- 3) Water helps the body absorb nutrients and then carry nutrients and oxygen to all cells in the body.
- 4) Water moistens oxygen for breathing. The lungs require approximately two glasses (16 ounces) of water a day to function properly.
- 5) Water protects and cushions vital organs and joints.
- 6) Water helps remove waste products from the body. Some waste products are toxic or can impair physical performance (i.e. urea and lactic acid) if they are not removed from body tissues and fluids.

Water is also a preferred beverage of choice because of accessibility, zero calories, zero fat, zero cholesterol, and low sodium.

Knowing that tap water meets health regulations, that it is relatively inexpensive, and that it has many health benefits, why not increase your daily consumption?

For more information about bottled water and water testing, visit the Geary County K-State Research & Extension office website at: <https://www.geary.k-state.edu/health-home-family/>. You will find a fact sheet under New Resources. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!