

Bottled Water

Hot Topics are short, concise practice and science-based answers to current questions RDs and DTRs may receive. Hot Topics are not an ADA position or stance on a topic and does not reflect Association consensus on the issue. Rather, they provide expert opinion to an emerging area of food, nutrition and health. Hot Topics are meant to assist RDs and DTRs to answer questions from patients/clients and the media.

CLAIM OF TOPIC

Is bottled water a better choice than tap water?

DISCUSSION OF TOPIC

Bottled water sales have soared in recent years, as people increasingly choose bottled water in place of calorie-laden beverages. Drinking sufficient water is certainly to be encouraged, but what type of water is better? The following are factors to consider:

- **Environment.** Because of the oil it takes to produce and transport the plastic bottles and the waste those bottles leave behind, bottled water is being criticized for its environmental impact. Several actions have been taken or proposed: Some restaurants and work places have banned bottled water, deposit laws were proposed to help boost recycling rates and manufacturers have introduced thinner bottles to reduce the amount of plastic. Some companies are even introducing aluminum and paper containers for water. Individuals also are buying bulk containers or water filters for tap water.
- **Safety.** Another timely issue is the potential risk from a chemical in some plastics called bisphenol A or BPA, which was sparked by a draft report from the U.S. National Toxicity Program. The report says there is “some concern” for infants and children and calls for more research. The American Chemistry Council, manufacturers of plastic products, has launched efforts to reinforce the safety of BPA in low doses. Tap water had its own scare recently with the report that pharmaceuticals were found in municipal water supplies. A study by the Natural Resources Defense Council concluded that bottled water is not safer or healthier than most tap water. Both are equally regulated – EPA regulates tap water while bottled water is regulated by FDA.
- **Cost.** One factor to consider when assessing the difference between tap and bottled water is the expense. A *New York Times* reporter calculated that eight glasses of New York City tap water would cost about 49 cents per year. Bottled water would be 2,900 times as much or \$1,400 per year.
- **Taste.** The taste of tap water may differ in various parts of the country. Some people simply prefer the taste of bottled water, or they find themselves drinking more water if they can choose flavored bottled waters. Increasing the appeal of water can encourage greater consumption – a health benefit as long as the flavored waters are not hidden sources of added sugar. Also, lemon or other flavorings can be added to tap water to enhance its acceptability.
- **Fluoride.** Most bottled waters are not fluoridated like tap water, which is a particular concern for children and teenagers.

BOTTOM LINE

Bottled and tap water are equally safe with similar regulatory oversight. Unless fortified, bottled water offers no significant nutritional advantage and the excessive use may have a negative impact on the environment. On the other hand, the increased availability of bottled water has helped encourage greater consumption of water, typically at the expense of sugary beverages, which is a positive trade-off.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE RD/DTR

RDs and DTRs can help educate consumers on the various issues related to water to help them make informed decisions. This information can be communicated through practice settings as well as community education and the media.

RESOURCES/REFERENCES

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- (3) U.S National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. National Toxicology Program. Draft Brief on Bisphenol A. <http://ntp.niehs.nih.gov>. Accessed May 1, 2008.
- (4) American Chemistry Council. Facts on Plastic. www.factsonplastic.com. Accessed May 1, 2008.
- (5) A Battle Between the Bottle and the Faucet. *New York Times*. www.nytimes.com. Posted July 15, 2007. Accessed May 1, 2008.
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