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HUFFPOST HEALTHY LIVING

The Hidden Dangers of Drinking Water

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I was born in the early 1960s in Seoul, Korea, and clean water was hard to come by. We bathed at the local bathhouses and had toilets outside of the home.

As a child, I remember we pumped our water from a well in our backyard. We were able to wash our hands, feet, and clothes with the well water, but never drink it.

My mother had a daily ritual of boiling our water in two to three pots at a time for at least one hour, then cooling it down for another hour before refrigerating a pitcher of clean water or making "boricha," a roasted corn tea. This went on all day.

South Korea was a third-world country with poor infrastructure where municipal water was found only in large cities and on U.S. military bases. When my family immigrated to Monterey, Calif. in the summer of 1975, I was delighted to find out that we could drink water directly out of the faucet without boiling it. I especially enjoyed drinking fresh, cold water from our garden hose on a hot summer day after playing with my new neighborhood friends!

Today, 40 years later, you may believe that municipal water is clean and safe to drink, but too many disturbing studies show otherwise.

One investigation in the *New York Times*, for instance, found that American tap water contributes to rashes and skin burns, erodes tooth enamel, and often contains arsenic, lead, barium, and other toxic chemicals.

An Associated Press investigation found numerous contaminants in every state's school water. Data from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) revealed 1 out of every 5 schools investigated violated the Safe Drinking Water Act during the past decade.

The EPA and Congress regulate over 100 pollutants and 91 chemicals through the Safe Drinking Water Act. Even so, EPA administrator Lisa Jackson admits that American water fails to meet public health goals, and water pollution law enforcement is unacceptably low.

These countless microorganisms and toxins in tap water can contribute to allergy symptoms and disease. Removing these chemicals from your drinking water will significantly reduce your internal toxic load and may improve your body's natural ability to deal with allergy symptoms.

For day two of my book, *The 7 Day Allergy Makeover*, I focus on cleaning up your tap water and purifying it into optimal drinkable water. Pure water is an essential nutrient, the basis of fluids of all living organisms, and necessary to sustain life. Water needs to be clean, free of toxins and microbes to prevent disease.

Water is considered a universal solvent, which can aid in reducing your allergy symptoms through cellular hydration. Water ingestion can reduce illnesses by decreasing the concentration of toxin and inflammatory histamines, as well as increasing lymph and bowel movement to flush out contaminants, waste, and microbes.

I invite you to incorporate the following five steps into your lifestyle to safely remove toxins, particulates and microbes from tap water and get adequate amounts of purified water to decrease allergy symptoms and restore your health.

Step 1: Only Drink Purified Water -- Water makes up approximately 60 percent of the human body. Your blood is 93 percent water and your muscles are about 75 percent water. Optimal water intake is an essential for human survival.

Tap, carbon filtered, alkaline, and even some bottled water contains chemicals, heavy metals, nuclear material, and potential allergens. By drinking purified water, you will minimize your exposure to contaminants and may potentially reduce your allergy symptoms.

Purified water comes from two methods of filtration: either distillation or reverse osmosis. Many patients ask me, "Isn't distilled water -- dead water? There are no minerals in it!"

Yes, both distilled and reverse osmosis water are devoid of minerals, but ingesting mineral-free purified water is not harmful to your body. A majority of third-world countries still drink rainwater. Warm, moist air rising up into the sky from evaporation of natural large bodies of water including rivers, lakes, and oceans builds clouds. Condensation of water vapor forms larger water droplets, and when the droplets are heavy enough they will fall from the clouds as rain. This process of water evaporation and

condensation is the largest distillation process on Earth!

Rainwater is not "dead water!" Minerals are essential to our cellular metabolism, growth, and vitality, and we get majority of them from eating food, not drinking water. Eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds, and you will be optimally mineralized and alkalinized.

Water bottling companies usually clean water using a triple purification system: carbon filtration (removes chlorine, chemicals and larger particulates), ozonation (eradicates microbes) and reverse osmosis (removes heavy metals, aluminum, nuclear waste.) You can buy purified drinking water in large bottles, preferably glass bottles, from delivery service companies and water service stores/clubs.

Step 2: Drink the Right Amount of Purified Water -- Dehydration slows your metabolism down, as well as the natural healing process of the body. When you drink adequate amounts of water, you can reduce allergenic symptoms and feel more alert and energetic.

Forget the eight-glasses-a-day myth. I want you to base the amount of water consumption by your body weight: Drink one-half of your body weight (lbs) in ounces of water. In another words, if you weigh 160 pounds, you should drink 80 ounces of water daily.

Increase your water intake if you sweat excessively from fever or exercise, or if you consume alcohol, coffee, and other caffeinated drinks, since they are diuretics and will dehydrate your cells and tissues. (And no, these drinks do not count towards your water quota.)

Sip purified water -- do not guzzle. Water-guzzlers are always running to the bathroom! Drinking water slowly gives your cells time to absorb it, and reduces how often you need to urinate.

Think of drinking water like pouring a bucket of water on dried-up leather. It won't adequately absorb the water, but if you drip water slowly over the leather, it rehydrates, becomes supple and malleable in no time.

Choose room-temperature over cold or iced water, which is easier on your digestive system.

Step 3: Invest in a Reverse Osmosis (RO) Unit -- If you want to significantly reduce water contamination, purchase a reverse osmosis (RO) unit.

Among the toxic chemicals you eliminate with an RO unit is arsenic. A disturbing study in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* found arsenic is prevalent in American drinking water and can contribute to skin cancer.

Chlorine is another prevalent toxin in tap water. A study in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* found chlorination disinfection byproducts in drinking water, such as trihalomethanes (THMs), could potentially contribute to low birth weight, preterm birth, birth defects, fetal deaths, and other adverse pregnancy problems.

An RO unit completely filters all natural and synthetic toxins, microbes, debris, and minerals. When you drink water filtered through an RO unit, you're getting 100 percent pure, high-quality drinking water that tastes great.

Until you install a reverse osmosis unit (step four), buy purified bottled water, triple-filtered (reverse osmosis, carbon filtered and ozonated) and preferably, in glass (not plastic) bottles. The label should indicate that its water has been filtered and processed through a reverse osmosis (RO) unit.

Another option: Have a company deliver your water monthly. Just specify reverse osmosis filtered, not spring or fluoridated water.

Step 4: Buy a Whole House Purification System -- "The best thing you can do for your hair costs less than nine cents a day," said Dr. Mehmet Oz on one episode of *Oprah*. "Get a charcoal filter and put it in your shower head."

Your skin also absorbs water when you wash your hands or shower. Toxins can seep through your skin and into your cells, triggering and exacerbating allergens.

I recommend you buy a whole house water purification system that you attach to the plumbing system at the point of entry into the house that will filter out chlorine, chemicals, particulates, and microorganisms. This water is not to be used for consumption, only for brushing your teeth, washing your hands and body, and washing your laundry.

If that's not possible, buy a shower filter that attaches to any showerhead. Rather than a poorly functioning small, round filter, I recommend a foot-long shower filter that attaches to your showerhead with an extension. The solid carbon block filters eliminate chlorine, chemicals, and allergens from your water. You should change the filter twice a year.

Step 5: Avoid Fluoridated Water

Most cities in the United States electively fluoridate their municipal water. In addition to your tap water, fluoride lurks in numerous products, including toothpaste, mouthwash, medications, green and black tea leaves, and drinks such as soda and juice.

Some critics argue that fluoridating drinking water prevents dental caries and tooth decay, but no diseases have ever been linked to a case of fluoride deficiency. To prevent tooth decay, fluoride works best when it is applied to the outside surface of the tooth, not when it comes from the inside of the body. So why do we swallow it?

A 2001 article in the *Journal of the American Dental Association* concludes that fluoride that is swallowed and incorporated into

teeth is "insufficient to have a measurable effect" on reducing cavities. Oral intake of fluoride may not be necessary and can even be detrimental for your health.

In The Journal of the American Dental Association, another study showed that fluoride is a toxic substance that destroys teeth in developing young children and babies.

In short, fluoride is not something you want in your drinking water. If your city adds fluoride to your tap water for drinking purposes, you should filter it with a reverse osmosis unit. You may want to invest in a fluoride whole house filtration system that are available online, but some argue that it may not filter out all of the fluoride and may be a waste of your money.

I have been using water filtration systems for over 15 years, and have both a whole house water purification system and a separate fluoride filtration system. I have installed a five foot fluoride filter last year. I did a before-and-after water analysis by a reputable lab on the fluoride level, and found that the fluoride filter I installed removed more than 95 percent of the fluoride. (For accuracy, I collected the water samples from my facet after running the water for 10 minutes through the filters.)

It has been about a year now, so it's time to perform a second analysis on the fluoride levels. I will make sure to post the results on my health blog!

Next Time: "Day 3 -- Clean Up Your Air." For more information, you are welcome to a free chapter from my book, The 7 Day Allergy Makeover.

For more by Dr. Susanne Bennett, click here.

For more on personal health, click here.

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