

[Water, Water Everywhere: Bottled Water Choices In Texas](#)

"Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink," or so the saying goes. Texas knows this well, with large swaths subject to extreme heat and drought inland, and non-potable salt water down in the Gulf. There may be water, but no one can drink it without treating it first.

East Texas is richer in water resources than the rest of the state, but even this area experiences shortages, resulting in citizens voluntarily, and sometimes involuntary, rationing. Cities like Houston, Dallas, and Austin are particularly vulnerable in the event of a public water system failure, due to massive populations. Summer, as well, brings about vulnerabilities for many Texas communities, as rain decreases during this time and water usage increases. Keep yourself healthy -- and that health insurance company happy -- by using enough to satisfy your needs, but not so much as to be less than conscious about shortages.

Not only has the Earth's fresh water supply been decreasing over the years, but so has its quality. Gone are the days when we could dip our hands into a cool, running stream, and trust the precious resource there to be clean and safe. Viruses, bacteria, parasites, industrial pollutants, and chemical runoffs abound, even in seemingly remote locations. Texas is far from immune.

Even tap water has come under disapproval over the last several years, and cities like Dallas and Houston are scrutinized as much as any. The Environmental Protection Agency's definition of clean water is vague, only that it is required to be "bacteriologically safe," but that doesn't address methods of cleaning, or all the chemicals that may be present. Advocacy groups charge the chlorine, artificial fluorides, and other chemicals used to clean and fortify the water do not rid it of every water-borne disease and, in the end, may be doing more harm than good.

The best thing to do entering the hot summer season is to be conscious of the amount and type of water you are consuming. Most local health departments test household tap water upon request, free of charge. This testing, however, will only guarantee safe levels of bacteria, not anything else. If, like so many, you are weary of the chemical concentrations in tap water, consider bottled alternatives. It's an easy way to keep yourself healthy and those health insurance premiums down.

Even choosing a bottled water can be confusing, though, as many different types of filters and classifications exist. The three main types of filters include: absorbent types, which use absorbent materials like carbon to filter impurities, microfiltration (and hyperfiltration) systems, which use tiny pores to catch and eliminate contaminants, and ion-exchange resins, which remove heavy metals. Once processed, the bottled water itself is classified by its source, its mineral content, and/or by the type of treatment undergone. To make life easier, here's a quick rundown of the basic types of bottled water, summarized from the text of Prescriptions for Nutritional Healing by James F. Balch, M.D., and Phyllis A. Balch, C.N.C.

(1) Deionized or Demineralized Water

Deionized or demineralized water has been neutralized by either the addition or removal of electrons. In other words, the electrical charge of the water has been neutralized. This process removes nitrates, the minerals calcium and magnesium, and the heavy metals cadmium, barium, lead, and some forms of radium.

(2) Mineral Water

Mineral water is mineralized, natural spring water, usually carbonated, and usually bottled in Europe or Canada. Actual mineral content varies widely depending on the source, and, while mineral water has been used to treat certain deficiencies, playing a guessing game on what minerals you could be missing could prove dangerous.

Some waters are also labeled "mineral" only because of certain additives placed in treated water, such as club soda, which adds bicarbonates, citrates, and sodium phosphates to filtered water. To be considered true mineral water, it must be bottled directly from its free-flowing source, cannot be pumped or forced from the ground, and must, of course, contain minerals.

(3) Natural Spring Water

This one's tricky. Labeling a water "natural" only tells the consumer the mineral content has not been changed -- not if, or how, it's been treated, and not where it was sourced. Similarly, "spring" has no legal definition in terms of how it's labeled on bottled water, so your favorite "natural spring water" may or may not have come from a spring, may or may not have come from a clean source, and may or may not have been treated. True natural spring water is water that has risen naturally to the surface from underground reservoirs.

The good news is that most reputable natural spring water companies willingly list their source on the label, and provide a toll-free number to answer any questions on how it was processed, what the mineral content is, and what method was used to test for contaminants.

(4) Steam-Distilled Water

Steam-distilled water is considered one of the healthier, purer forms of waters available, and is cleaned of impurities through the distillation process -- that is, water is boiled, and the steam condenses in a separate chamber, where it is allowed to cool and condense into liquid form again. The result is a water virtually free of bacteria, viruses, chemicals, minerals, and pollutants. Minerals can then be added back in for health purposes.

It may, at first, seem a bit redundant to remove the minerals only to return them by hand, but, upon closer inspection, it does make sense. Mineral water is not necessarily clean of impurities, and, with all the chemicals running amuck in our water systems (natural or human-made), it is better to remove those contaminants, and add a few minerals back in, than to keep any one of the toxic impurities just to save the minerals. Many health practitioners also believe that steam-distilled water acts as a body cleanser, leaching inorganic materials rejected by cells and tissues, and removing them from the body.

(5) Reverse-Osmosis Water

Osmosis is the natural process of a solute moving from an area of low solute concentration to an area of high solute concentration through a membrane, such as a cell membrane. Reverse-osmosis, then, is the opposite of this process. As the solute is forced by pressure from an area of high (solute) concentration to an area of lower concentration, impurities are filtered out. This process is best known for its use in desalination, but, in recent years, health practitioners have been learning about RO's health benefits.

In the water filtration industry, RO is actually considered to be in the highest category, "hyperfiltration" -- above micro- and nanofiltration -- for its ability to filter anything one angstrom or larger. Microfiltration, for instance, can only screen for 500 angstroms or larger. The result is a water virtually free of microorganisms and pollutants.

There is some controversy over which of the last two is better -- distillation or reverse-osmosis. They are, in fact, both extremely effective systems, both are readily available at natural health markets, and both have their advantages. Distillers are typically better at removing common mineral constituents, like sodium, while reverse-osmosis systems, with the proper carbon filters, are better at removing volatile chemicals with a low boiling point, like chloramines. Neither leaves enough mineral content to speak of -- RO leaves a bit more, but typically only 5%.

In reality, the mineral content of the water is not the issue, as these needs are easily provided for through healthy eating. What is of more concern to most is the level of bacteria, viruses, parasites, and pollutants. Both filter these quite effectively. Preference, then, often simply comes down to taste.

Whether you choose a good natural spring water, or go all out and buy your own reverse-osmosis system, water is the most important thing you will consume on a daily basis. Keep conscious of your intake, especially as the summer heat encroaches, and your season will be filled with healthy, sunshine-filled fun.

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