

Check Labels on Flavored Water Bottles

I switched my beverage of choice from pop to bottled flavored water. I'm enjoying trying a lot of different brands and flavors. Is there anything I should be on the lookout for when choosing which one to try next?

Water is a great alternative to sugary soft drinks. But as you reach for your next flavored bottled water, be sure to take a close look at the label to make sure you're consuming what you think you are. Some bottled flavored water is actually just that — water with flavorings. In fact, a range of flavors of unsweetened carbonated water is now widely available. But some products labeled “water” contain a lot of sugar and calories, caffeine, artificial sweeteners or other additives that you may prefer to avoid.

First, read the Nutrition Facts label. Look at the calories per serving and the number of servings per container. That will quickly let you know how many calories you'll be consuming after you twist off the bottle top.

Second, read the ingredients listings carefully. Are you satisfied with what you see? Watch out for sugar, which can be labeled as many different things, including corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), honey, malt syrup, nectars (such as peach nectar or pear nectar) and sucrose.

Note that caffeine doesn't have to be listed as an ingredient if it is naturally present in one of the other ingredients — tea, for example. But if it's added on its own, it has to be in the ingredients listing.

Many flavored waters boast they contain vitamins and antioxidants. That's all well and good, but it can be an expensive way to consume them. Eat a wide variety of produce — five servings a day or more — and you'll be fine on that score. It's a similar situation to that of sports drinks — athletes who vigorously exercise for an hour or more may benefit from the carbohydrates and electrolytes that sports drinks contain, but many people who reach for those beverages simply don't need them, or the calories they contain. If water with vitamins also contains sweeteners, then it probably isn't a healthy option.

Overall, water is the best choice to quench your thirst. Since you are interested in flavored water, why not make your own? Just fill a glass or pitcher with cold water and make some additions. Here are some ideas to try:

- Fresh mint leaves
- Sliced cucumber
- Cubed watermelon or cantaloupe
- Sliced oranges, lemons or limes
- A splash of orange, pineapple or grapefruit juice

Just be sure to thoroughly rinse any such ingredients under running water before adding them to your water. Anything with a tough outside skin or rind should be scrubbed with a vegetable brush under running water before being cut into, to make sure any contaminants on the exterior aren't transferred to your fresh glass of cool water. (Author: Filipic, M. [2015]. *Chow Line is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.*)

Pat Brinkman is the Ohio State University Extension Educator for Family & Consumer Sciences. CFAES provides research and related educational programs to clients on a nondiscriminatory basis. For more information: go.osu.edu/cfaesdiversity.



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