

Lifting the lid on bottled water

Australians drink 600 million litres a year of bottled water at a cost of \$500 million - but what are we really drinking?

Today Tonight reveals the results of the most comprehensive lab tests yet, uncovering exactly what's in bottled and tap water and which is better for you.

MGT Environmental Laboratories analysed six bottled water samples, as well as one sample of Melbourne tap water.

Dr Wyt Garnys examined the results.

"We looked for the mineral content - sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and associated with those sodium chloride, phosphate the sulphate and the fluoride," he said.

A second set of samples was sent to Neil Bartlett from Food Labs Australia.

"We're looking for the total number of bacteria in the water, also for indicator tests for contamination," he said.

Geoff Parker, CEO of the Australasian Bottled Water Institute advises that the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines lists upwards of 35 chemicals that can be added to town water.

"Bottled water can only have about 3 or 4 and they're around things like chlorine, ozone for example, just to purify it a little bit more," said Geoff.

"Pure water would be sourced from municipal water supplies and undergo more extensive filtering than what town water would," he added.

Our experts who undertook the water analysis disagreed with Geoff, "The seven samples were all very similar in terms of their salt content and their mineral level in the sense of being at the low end. Tap water was medium - in between those," said Wyt.

Compared to tap water, some of the samples had higher mineral levels - others less - but overall there wasn't much difference. Sodium levels were much higher in the brands Fiji Water and Cool Ridge than in the tap water.

But the tap water had higher calcium levels than four of the bottled water samples.

"The big difference is that tap water is collected on a large scale and it's not economic to further purify that tap water. Fluoride is added. We haven't seen fluoride in the bottled waters," said Wyt.

According to the Dental Association of Australia there's been an escalation in childhood dental decay. Whether it's a coincidence that this rise follows the increase in bottled water sales is yet to be proven.

"If you're only giving your children bottled water, living only on bottled water, you're not getting that valuable fluoride that we know is vital for dental health," says dietician Emma Stirling.



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