?Drinking tap water instead of bottled water not such a good idea after all, studies find

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In recent years, drinking tap water has become increasingly popular. Tap water is better for the environment and is much cheaper than filtered water. But is it safer?

In case you have missed it: cancer rates have been on the rise for the last several decades. Dr. Goldberg says this might have something to do with the water we drink. Apart from that, our drinking water is contains new types of parasites, we previously didn't know about.

Chlorine

Chlorination of water ensures it is clean from parasites and other harmful microbes living in the water. Chlorination by itself is not unsafe, but the chlorination by-products can potentially be harmful for your health, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. If chlorine comes in contact with organic matter (such as soil and dead leaves) the chlorination process can increase cancer risk. Studies have linked chlorinated water to miscarriage, stillbirth and increased chance of bladder cancer.

Heavy metals

While trace elements of many metals (such as magnesium and selenium) are necessary for good health, some, like lead and aluminium, are not. Lead, mercury, copper, arsenic and cadmium are often found in drinkwater. In small quantities these heavy metals are not risky for your health, but drinking water with heavy metals during a prolonged period of time, might seriously affect your health. One of the risks associated with prolonged intake of small amounts of heavy metals is an increased cancer risk. According to a study published by the British Medical Bulletin, heavy metal intake increased by up to 800% in the past 100 years. The main sources for contamination are our food. In order to minimise your overall cancer risk, it is important to limit intake of all heavy metals and drink purified water.

Apart from the increased risk for cancer, both lead and aluminium poison the internal organs before settling in the brain and bones. Excess aluminium is widely believed to trigger Alzheimer's disease, which causes dementia as the brain is rapidly destroyed. Despite EU regulations limiting lead concentrations to 50 micrograms per litre (the equivalent of 250 grains of icing sugar), the Medical Research Council has concluded that there is no evidence of a safe level for lead. Filtering your water helps to get rid of heavy metals and chlorine.

Even though the environmental cost of bottled water is much higher, several studies now find that tap water can cause cancer and parasite infections.

If heavy metals and chlorine lurking in your water wasn't enough, wait until you learn more about these frightening parasites

British tap water used to be one of the safest and cleanest worldwide. Getting sick from tap water, has usually been linked with developing countries. In recent years, more and more cases of waterborne infections have emerged, right here in the UK. In this article we investigate: how extensive this problem really is, when you are most in danger and how you can minimise the risk of getting cancer and how you can minimise the risk of being infected with deadly parasites.

The cost of bottled water

From a health perspective, drinking plenty of tap water each day is becoming increasingly popular. The cost of bottled water is up to 1,000 times higher than the cost of tap water. Even more shockingly, almost half of all bottled water comes from municipal water supplies and is then filtered.

Although safer, bottled water is a waste of money and resources. The environmental cost of packaging and transporting it is very high. Over 75% of empty plastic bottles are only used once, ending up in waste disposal facilities, contributing to higher overall pollution.

You can't taste nor see this parasite

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Giardia is one of the world's most common micro-parasites. It's prevalent in many developing countries. The danger lies in the fact that it's very hard to spot them and water companies are not always testing for them. Only when a sample of your stool gets tested, you will find out that you are or were a carrier of this parasite.

There is hope: when discovered at an early stage, the outspread of Giardia might be prevented, decreasing the number of people unknowingly carrying the virus. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC") in the United States, using an effective type of water filter system in your home can prevent outspread of Giardia and other waterborne viruses.

Some people carry the Giardia parasite with them for many years, without any symptoms

Because it's relatively uncommon in Britain, symptoms are often mistaken for something else, making diagnosis a real challenge. Although the risk is low, in the meanwhile, you can even infect others. Doctors will often think it is norovirus. Public Health England concludes that Giardia cases are probably underreported, so the real number of people carrying Giardia might be much higher. Symptoms vary greatly, from stomach pain, diarrhoea, skin rash or mood swings.

Cumbria & Lancashire Public Health Unit concluded: "Although it's currently still rare, the more you look for Giardia, the more you will find it", which is frightening in itself, as it means that the real number of infections is far higher and could potentially turn into a serious national health problem if not addressed properly. Giardia is mainly spread by human-to-human contact, animal or human faeces and polluted water.

Meet this fatal parasite: "Crypto"

In August 2015, 300,000 UK households were affected by the spread of this parasite in North-West England. Cryptosporidium can survive outside the body for a very long time. "Crypto" as this waterborne parasite is commonly called, causes Watery diarrhea, Stomach cramps or pain, Dehydration, Nausea, Vomiting, Fever and Weight loss. Sometimes, there are no symptoms at all, but more commonly, symptoms are mistaken for other more common diseases or the common cold. When left untreated, an infection with "Crypto" may seriously affect the respiratory tract or the digestive tract. The risk of developing more serious diseases depends on each person's degree of immunosuppression.

Even Though United Utilities has now installed UV filters and an outspread is rare, the bug can still pop up in other parts of Britain, and taking the right measurements to protect yourself is essential. According to the CDC, in rare cases, Cryptosporidium can lead to death.

A cheap alternative to bottled water is filtering and/ or boiling your water. The environmental impact is lower than drinking bottled water and it's equally safe.

How to protect yourself and your family?

Prevention is always better than treatment. That's why the CDC recommends to always use a water filter in order to protect yourself from disease, heavy metals and chlorine. Water filters do not protect against parasites, but they do filter the water from heavy metals and chlorine.

Chances of ever encountering parasites in your drinking water are extremely small, but nearly all drinking water has contamination from heavy metals and chlorine byproducts. Taking one of the following measures is essential for your health:

1. Change your fridge filter maximum every 6 months (fridge owners)

According to the "Fridge Filter Shop", if you have a fridge filter (Most Samsung fridges offer this option, but other brands do too), it is essential to change this filter every 6 months. If you do not change your water filter regularly, this can lead to a buildup of contaminants, which eventually can leach back into your water contributing to unsafe drinking water. On average a filter life is around 6 months, depending on the water usage in your household.

2. Boil your water

A time-consuming option for better quality water is to boil the water before use. Boiling the water removes most parasites found in drinking water.

3. Buy a fridge with an in-built water dispenser or invest in a water filter system

An easy way to protect yourself, is to utilise the water dispenser on your refrigerator. These types of refrigerators have a water filter installed, which protects from contaminants such as heavy metal and chlorine byproducts.

4. Buy bottled water

Bottled water is by far the most expensive way to ensure clean water without contaminants. According to "The Water Project", for every bottle of water produced, 3 litres of water is needed, amongst other environmental consequences of using bottled water.

5. Buy any type of water filter

Other point-of-use filters are also available. A popular but expensive option in the house is a whole-house water filtration system, these systems are usually installed at the point where the water supply enters your house. Installing a system like this can be a challenge. Cheaper household water treatment options include faucet water filtration kits and under sink filter systems.

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