

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

April 17, 2014

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### Flavor Your Water?

Bored with plain water? Don't like the flavor of your tap water? The children want colors in what they drink? There are surely lots of other reasons too, but the flavored water industry is booming these days. The amount of sodas, including diet sodas, that we are buying is actually going down. Industry analysts think that a lot of the 'blame' (or credit, depending on your point of view) is due to the increased amount of flavored non-cola drinks we are buying instead.

There are plenty of options for flavoring water without making it into sodas. Coffee and tea of course have been around for centuries, but some people choose to limit those due to their caffeine. Then there are things like FlavorSplash and Vitaminwater, flavored sparkling water or seltzer with added flavors, and the various powders and drops such as Crystal Light and MiO that we can add to our own water. With all these choices, which is best?

The short answer to that question is PLAIN WATER! What our bodies really need is the water. (Forget 8 cups a day, there is no magic number you much drink.) The extras, including flavors, colors, carbonation and the added vitamins, minerals or herbs are simply to tickle our tongues and get us to open our pocketbooks even wider to pay for them. Don't expect any of them to really give your body enough extra to make any difference in your health or well-being.

What we don't need, that some of these beverages have plenty of, is calories. Some of them have as much sugar as sodas do. They might not have the caramel coloring or cola flavoring. Some are not even carbonated, but they're just sodas in disguise. Read the labels, and skip the sugars.

A lot of the newer ones are calorie-free. But many are just as sweet due to the non-caloric sweeteners they use, from sucralose to stevia. Some people choose to avoid the sweeteners; others accept the medical literature that so far finds no evidence of risks. There are people who feel that using artificial sweeteners makes them want more sweets, so they end up eating more calories. If you're in that category, then read the labels and skip the sweeteners too.

Some soda alternatives are carbonated. The Sparkling Ice products in the tall thin bottles are popular enough that they are being copied by newer products. Most are fruit-flavored, and colored

with synthetic colors. Most use artificial sweeteners. But there are flavored seltzers with no added sweeteners or colors. Take the labels off them and they're clear as water. But they're still carbonated. Carbonated water is highly acidic. Rinsing our teeth all day long in acid is definitely not a good idea, for us as adults or for our children.

Finally there are the powders and drops we can add to water. You can look at them as glorified Kool-Aid for adults if you want. Some add sugar, some use sweeteners. They add artificial colors and flavors. Ignore any claims for health benefits. If anything else is added it's rarely there in a large enough or reliable enough quantity to do us much good.

One last point to consider is how much these things cost. You pay for the extra packaging, all the advertising, whatever other ingredients there are, and the fuel and trucks to ship the bottles around the country. We all pay for all the plastic bottles that end up in landfills or squashed along the side of the road. Compared to the cost of our tap water, they are enormously expensive. Tap water is tested regularly for safety, much more often than bottled water is.

If you really don't like the flavor of your tap water, then flavor it - with fruit, juice or herbs. Just add one or more of the following to a pitcher of water: a slice of watermelon or pineapple, some orange or lemon wedges, cucumber or ginger slices, a sprig or two of fresh herbs. Refrigerate, then enjoy. This recipe is a little more involved, but has many fewer calories than a smoothie and is still plenty healthy. Enjoy!

#### Berry Apple Sparkler

2/3 cup apple juice

2 cups whole strawberries

1 cup club soda or plain seltzer water

Wash and cap berries. Set aside 2 or 3 for garnish if desired. Blend berries and juice in blender until smooth. Add club soda or seltzer. Pour into 2 or 3 glasses. Add a berry to each glass. Serves 3.

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