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You Are What You Drink: What Do You Know About Your Drinking Water?

Am I really what I drink?

→ **Yes.** About 66% of your body is made of water.

How much water do I use each day?

→ The average person uses about **50 gallons** of water per day for drinking, bathing, cooking, washing, etc.

The earth is covered with water. Does that mean we have an endless supply of drinking water?

→ **No.** About 97% of the earth's water is in the oceans, so is salty and undrinkable. Two percent of the earth's water is frozen (mostly in polar icecaps). Only 1% of the earth's water is fresh and not frozen, so suitable for drinking water. Of that, even less is readily available (easy enough to reach and treat to make it feasible to use). This is why it is important to not waste water.

Who supplies my family's drinking water?

- **It depends.** Most people in Idaho get their water from a public water system. If you live in a town, this is probably where your water comes from. Your family pays for it, just like it pays for electricity. This covers the cost of bringing the water to your house and keeping your water clean and safe.
- Some people get their water from private wells. If you live in the country, this is probably where your water comes from. Your family doesn't pay anyone for this water, but does pay for the equipment and water testing.
- If you aren't sure if you have a well or are connected to a public water system, ask your mom or dad.

Where does my drinking water come from? That is, where was my water before it was piped to my house?

→ **Probably from under ground.** In Idaho, 96% of our drinking water comes from ground water (water found under the ground) and 4% of our drinking water comes from surface water (lakes and rivers). Idaho is unusual in this respect. Nationally, 66% of drinking water comes from surface water.

Is "someone" out there making sure my water is clean and safe?

- **It depends.** If you are connected to a public drinking water system, by law, that system must ensure your drinking water is safe. However, sometimes things can go wrong. If your water is not safe, the company will tell you and tell you what to do for drinking water until your water is safe again.
- If you have your own well, your family is in charge of making sure it is safe to drink. No one does this for you.

Should my family test our drinking water?

- If you get your water from a public water system you do not need to test your water. (Although you always can if you want.)
- If you get your water from a private well, your family should have your drinking water tested. A certified drinking water laboratory can test your water for you. Have your parents call their local DEQ regional office for help in deciding what contaminants they should test for. There is not just a “drinking water test” that tests for all things.

My water looks and smells bad, but “they” say it is safe to drink. Is it really?

- **Generally, yes**, if you are connected to a public drinking water system. Sometimes water can look or smell bad and still be safe. Minerals in your water may give it the appearance of being “dirty” without affecting how safe it is to drink. Sometimes you may smell the chlorine that was used to clean your water. Fire hydrant flushing and water main repairs can disturb sediments in water mains, resulting in red or brown-colored water. While the discolored water won’t hurt you, it can stain your laundry. *However, if you think you have a problem with your water, have your parents contact your local water system right away.*
- If you have your own private well, you may want to have your water tested if it looks or smells funny or different than normal.

Is bottled water better than tap water?

- **Not necessarily.** Bottled water is generally not safer than tap water, although it is almost always more expensive. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets standards for tap water provided by public water systems; the Food and Drug Administration sets bottled water standards based on EPA’s tap water standards.
- Bottled and tap water are both safe to drink if they meet their standards. Some bottled water is treated more than tap water, while some is treated less or not treated at all.
- Bottled water is valuable in emergency situations, such as natural disasters, or if your tap water is temporarily unsafe to drink.

What can I do to help keep my drinking water safe?

Since our drinking water comes from ground and surface water, keeping drinking water safe means keeping ground and surface water clean. There are many things you can do:

- Avoid pouring chemicals (paint, antifreeze, motor oil, even soda!) on the ground. They can run off into surface water or seep into ground water.
- Clean up after your pet.
- Remind your mom and dad to use the correct amount of fertilizer so extra doesn’t wash away.
- Don’t pour anything down storm drains (those grates along the side of the road). They drain straight to surface or ground water.
- Throw your litter into a garbage can and pick up other people’s litter when you see it.
- Reuse or recycle things instead of throwing them away, when possible.
- Bring used hazardous products (such as paint or lawn chemicals) to household hazardous waste days or to hazardous waste exchanges instead of throwing them in the garbage.
- Don’t dump animal and yard waste in ditches or irrigation canals.
- If your family has a private well, take care to not store or use chemicals near the wellhead.