

The Truth About The Alkaline Water Trend

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As [soda](#) taxes go into effect and fancy juices get called out for being [sugar bombs](#), people are more aware than ever that when it comes to healthy beverages, water is best. But lest we leave well enough alone, there's a new trend claiming to make the healthiest beverage even healthier: alkaline water.

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Chances are you've seen it gracing the front shelves of your grocery store (especially if you shop at an all-natural, organic joint), and heard about celebrities like [Miranda Kerr](#) and celeb trainers like [Anna Kaiser](#) drinking it in bulk. But why? What's the deal with this special H₂O and should we choose it over the regular stuff? We break it down, drop by drop.

What is alkaline water and what does it do?

Simply put, alkaline water has a higher pH than regular water. “PH is the measure of the hydrogen ion concentration in a solution,” explains Pamela Hinton, Ph.D., associate professor of nutrition and exercise physiology at the University of Missouri. “The pH scale ranges from 0 to 14. The more hydrogen ions, the more acidic the solution, and the lower the pH.” Anything with a pH below 7 is considered acidic and anything above a 7 pH is referred to as basic. Pure tap water that comes out of your faucet has a pH level of 7, which is considered neutral—neither acidic nor basic. Bottled water can vary by a few pH units ranging from 6.5 to 8.5.

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Then there’s alkaline water—water with a pH level of greater than 7. This is typically accomplished by adding an alkalizing agent, such as calcium or magnesium, to bring the pH up to 8, 8.8, or even 9.5 or more in some cases. A bottle will generally run you between \$2 and \$5.

Alkaline water is touted as being able to protect the body from toxins and improve overall health thanks to its being less acidic than tap water. It’s thought to be good for athletes because (in addition to regular hydration) it is thought to neutralize the build up of lactic acid in the blood and aid in recovery. And there have been weight loss and anti-aging claims from both alkaline water companies and individuals drinking it.

“Most of the claims are weak and speculative from a research-based perspective. However, while it hasn’t been scientifically proven, it also hasn’t been disproven,” Adam Rosante, a certified sports nutritionist in New York City, tells SELF. “I wouldn’t say that it’s a hoax, but that the scientific research just doesn’t fully validate all the claims that are being made.”

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Let’s break it down, claim by claim.

Decreasing the acidity of the body:

First off, it’s important to understand that the body doesn’t have one universal pH. Different parts have different levels of acidity for different reasons. For instance, a healthy person’s blood pH is usually around 7.4, while the pH of stomach acid is maintained around 1.5 to 3.5, explains Hinton. “The acidic environment is needed to digest food, especially protein,” she says.

“It is possible that alkaline water can make minute changes in blood pH, but the body has a fierce regulation system that is hard to destabilize,” says Nadya Sweden, M.D., physical medicine specialist in New York City. “There is no medical proof that supports these claims, though.”

Even if it does make a difference, it's probably not remotely necessary; a healthy person doesn't generally have issues maintaining appropriate pH levels. The body has multiple mechanisms of its own to get rid of any extra acid, explains Stanley Goldfarb, M.D., professor of medicine at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

Helping with exercise recovery:

"Blood lactate was believed to be bad for recovery in athletes—lactate being an acid that people therefore thought should be neutralized," explains Sweden. "But in recent years, sports nutrition and medicine has discovered the benefits of blood lactate and that it should not be neutralized." Blood lactate (aka lactic acid) does accumulate in the blood after high-intensity exercise, but it is naturally cleared out, especially if you practice active recovery.

Protection from toxins:

"Alkaline water has been shown to break down disinfectant by-products formed in tap water," explains Rosante, referring to compounds that are created when water is purified for public consumption. So theoretically, alkaline water should be free of those potentially harmful compounds. "But, other disinfectant by-products have been evidenced to thrive in an alkaline environment. It's just not so cut and dried."

As for claims that alkaline water detoxifies your body: That's what your liver is for, and it does its job just fine on its own.

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Benefits to bone health:

Bottled alkaline water that has an alkalizing agent like calcium or magnesium may have some bone health benefits—but not because of the pH. That benefit comes courtesy of the mineral content, which can help support strong bones. The same is true of spring or mineral water, which is naturally alkaline because it picks up minerals as it runs over rocks. "If you're eating a balanced diet, though, you're probably already getting all the minerals you need," Goldfarb tells SELF. The alkalinity from these minerals is thought to help prevent acid reflux, too, he adds. "Tums is alkaline, for example, and that is how it reduces indigestion." But if you're drinking alkaline water to battle indigestion, Rosante suggests figuring out why you have indigestion in the first place and addressing the underlying cause instead of just treating the aggravating symptom.

Long story short: Alkaline water isn't bad for you, but it's probably not much better than regular ol' tap water.

There's nothing wrong with alkaline water—it's safe to drink and hasn't been reported to cause any health issues. So if you like the flavor or just want to try this trendy beverage, feel free to take a swig. But if you opt not to pay up for a fancified version of the stuff in your sink, you won't be missing out on major health benefits.

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