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health

Clear Water

Nothing's more elemental than water. But it may not be as crystal clear as it seems.

By **Bill Giebler**



The feel of cool, clean, sparkling water washing over our bodies is not only physically cleansing; it can provide a profoundly satisfying emotional reset. But the water we use in our daily lives—and the effect it has on our health—may not be as crystal clear as it seems. Here are a few things to bear in mind before drinking up or diving in. →

Chlorine in tap water is the biggest concern when it comes to our health. While many of us filter it out of our drinking water, we still bathe in chlorinated water. Research suggests we’ve got this backwards, though, because the negative effects of chlorinated bath water go much deeper than simple dryness and itchy skin, deeper even than premature aging and the link between chlorine and skin cancer.

In fact, we absorb more of the toxins related to chlorine—like carcinogenic chloroform—into our internal organs during a single shower than we do by drinking a day’s worth of chlorinated water.

A filtering shower head can go a long way. A whole-house filter may be even better. Other considerations that reduce chlorine exposure have additional benefits as well.

Lowering bathing temperature and turning the water off while soaping up—familiar ways to save precious water and lower utility bills—will reduce the presence of chloroform in the air. And that is a good idea, since inhalation is the quickest way these toxins reach our bloodstream, faster than through the skin or ingestion. Lowering the water temperature will also reduce the drying effects water can have.

Look at pH, too. While pure water typically has a neutral pH, municipal waters vary. Paying attention to pH values in general—inside and out—can have a profound effect on health. pH (literally “power of hydrogen”) refers to the spectrum from most acidic to most alkaline, represented numerically as 0 to 14 respectively. Seven is neutral.

To put these numbers to work in skincare, for example, we start by looking at the skin’s mild force field called the acid mantle. Healthy skin will be around pH 5.5, and your products should be, too—in fact, this is what’s meant by “pH-balanced.” (If your favorite product labels don’t mention pH, don’t give up. Inexpensive test strips can be purchased at the drugstore to test the pH of your skincare.)

“Skin that is either dry or with premature wrinkles may be due to your skin’s pH being too high,” says Medical Esthetician Jennifer R. Fisher, owner of Boulder, CO’s Vasu Skin Solutions. Using alkaline products (soap for instance, or chlorinated water), “causes a breakdown in the necessary lipids in your acid mantle.” On the other hand, “skin that is breaking out and oily,” continues Fisher, “may be due to your skin having a low pH that is too acidic.”

“The radiance of your skin is the most effective barometer of your overall health,” says *Health Wise: True Health and Happiness for the Empowered Woman* (BalboaPress) author and Boulder, CO-based Nutritional Therapist Sue Van Raes. Part of this radiance can be attributed to maintaining healthy alkalinity internally, which favors a healthier immune system. Consuming a diet that’s too acidic (foods with a high glycemic value and highly processed foods) creates toxins that escape through our skin. Van Raes recommends focusing on a

diet of whole foods, “to give you the best chance of having an alkaline system.”

Facial cleansing with oil is seeing a modest resurgence, and for good reason. It’s mild: With a pH near 5.5, these oils work with—not against—your acid mantle. It avoids water, which can be drying, especially if you have sensitive skin. And it works.

Fats attract and dissolve other fats, and do so gently. A facial massage with vegetable oils will attract and remove grime and toxins using a clean washcloth, leaving behind pH-balanced skin that’s not excessively dry.

“Your internal system has to be alkalized properly for you to be creating lower toxicity and better hormonal balance, which both impact your skin,” summarizes Van Raes. “And then on the outside make sure that your skin is being treated well with pH-balanced skin products.”

Keeping in mind some of the simple chemistry of diet and skincare, you’ll find it’s safe to get back into the (chlorine-free!) water. Dive in!

The Water Menu

Choosing the right water to complement your wine and enhance the flavors of your food.

When crafting the perfect meal, chefs and sommeliers consider how the food pairs with the wine...and the water? “The wine term ‘terroir’ can be applied to water, too,” explains Andreas Larsson, named the Best Sommelier of the World in 2007. “The nature of the source, the minerality, the time spent in the ground—it all affects the taste of the water, which then has an effect on your palate.”

Since 2007, Larsson has been working with Italian water brands Acqua Panna (acquapanna.com) and San Pellegrino (sanpellegrino.com), the preferred waters of international sommelier association tastings, to spread the word on “harmonizing”—the art of choosing the right water to complement your wine and enhance the flavors of your food. Here are some of his H2O tips:

Bubbles vs. Flat Still waters like Acqua Panna let the flavors of what you are eating come through, while a low-pH, small-bubbled sparkling water like San Pellegrino cleanses the palate and helps balance bolder flavors. (Meanwhile, says Larsson, “tap water totally coats your tongue and changes the taste of wine,” while sparkling waters with bigger bubbles are “more for refreshing, not dining.”)

Either way, your water should not be drunk too cold, though still water should be served slightly cooler than sparkling.

Keep It Clean “You don’t drink water for an explosion of exotic flavor, so to put lemon or lime in it is a big mistake,” says Larsson. He also recommends always dining with a mineral water—which typically come from natural thermal and mineral springs, and have replenishing minerals like magnesium—over distilled water, to help temper the effects of rich foods and alcohol.

Perfect Pairings A light-bodied still like Acqua Panna pairs well with softer wines with moderate alcohol levels, and foods that are lighter in flavor and aromas. Look for fresh and fruity white wine, lighter rosé, seafood, pasta with less sauce, and dishes with more salt. With a sparkling like San Pellegrino, go for full-bodied wines with bolder tanning and higher acid, and foods with heavier flavors and textures. Choose rosé wine with higher alcohol content, spicy foods, and grilled meals. Another tip: with very sweet foods, still water will leave the sugar on the palate, while sparkling will cleanse it. —*Sandra Ramani*



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