

9. Recreational water is for swimming, not for swallowing. At a given swimming facility, even well maintained ones, swimmers who place their heads underwater tend to have more gastrointestinal illnesses than swimmers who do not, and waders have the fewest such illnesses. Factors increasing risk of illness include: poor maintenance, crowding, babies in diapers, and no chlorination (lakes and rivers), for example.



10. Suspect all natural water in the wilderness. Folklore says that water in the wilderness is safe to drink if it is upstream from large animals or comes gurgling out of the ground. The problem is that disease-causing organisms also come from birds, small animals, and humans and you can't get upstream of these. And water refreshingly gurgling out of the ground may be seeping into the ground elsewhere. Boil or disinfect natural water. Easily used water disinfectants and filters are available at sporting goods stores and on the internet. Follow instructions on labels.



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EVERYWHERE,
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Two diners sit in a restaurant overseas. One asks the waiter for a glass of water. The other says he wants the same, but the last time he was at this restaurant he was served water in a dirty glass, and became ill. The waiter listens, goes, and returns with two glasses, and asks, "Which one of you asked for a clean glass."

When you travel, drinking lots of water helps you stay fit – as long as the water is fit to drink. Being well hydrated helps counteract some of the vagaries of travel: in-flight low humidity, fatigue and jetlag; altitude; and hot and cold environments, for example. Minimal dehydration, which occurs even before you feel thirsty, subtly affects your mental and physical abilities.

But water is not always fit to drink. It may be contaminated with microorganisms that cause intestinal upsets, especially where sanitation is poor. Drinking bottled water is a safer bet. But all bottled waters are not the same.

Here's how to get the clean glass, so to speak.

1. Drink bottled water wherever you travel.

Tap water everywhere contains some microorganisms. While you body is accustomed to the organisms in your water at home, organisms in tap water elsewhere - even where sanitation is good - may be sufficiently different to cause you mild upsets the first few days you drink it. Such discomforts are often blamed on jetlag and fatigue. Remedies for jetlag and fatigue may include drinking lots of water. If you drink tap water, your "remedy" worsens your discomfort.

2. Selecting a bottled water is almost as important for your wellbeing as selecting wine is for your palate. Bottled water is merely subterranean spring water or treated tap water, and unless optimally processed, no better than tap water. Where sanitation is poor, opt for well known international brands. Local brands may contain organisms and, sometimes chemicals and other contaminants, arsenic in southern Asia, for example.

Drinking carbonated bottled water adds another layer of safety. Carbonation acidifies water, killing most organisms. Such water is known everywhere as "with gas," even by waiters who speak no other word of English.

Some bottled water is mineral water and contains calcium, sodium and other minerals, often in large amounts. These substances may worsen some heart and kidney problems or interfere with the effects of medications you take. Read labels. Some overseas spas tout their mineral waters as being therapeutic for all kinds of ailments, claims largely unproven.

3. "No ice, please." While everyone knows this, many travelers, especially Americans, are addicted to iced beverages, a habit so powerful that it overrides judgment. Ice is acceptable in areas where sanitation is good; a cube contains an ounce or so of water, hardly likely to have sufficient organisms to make you ill.

But in developing countries, watch out! Ice cubes are usually made from tap water, often in difficult to clean equipment. Sometimes, ice is delivered to local restaurants and bars in large blocks and then chipped into small pieces. Take a look at the kitchen door of the establishment you are in. You may see the block sitting on the ground. Enough said.

For ice addicts, a reasonable alternative way to cool drinks is to carry small, leak-proof plastic bags, place the ice in the bag, and insert the bag into your drink.

4. "No ice please" does not necessarily mean that you will get no ice. Waiters, like the rest of us, are creatures of habit. Often when you ask for no ice in a drink that traditionally takes ice, you will get ice. When you remind waiters of your "no ice" request, they get rid of the ice, but how do they get rid of it:

- Remove the ice (with their hands?) and fill the glass with more of the drink?*
- Pour out the drink and fill the same glass with a new drink?*
- Get a fresh glass with a fresh drink?*

Hopefully, "c". In "a" and "b," the water from the melting ice is in your drink or adhering to your original glass.

5. Even 100-proof liquor on the rocks does not make for 100% fool-proof drinks. Yes, alcohol does reduce the number of organisms in a drink, but in an unpredictable manner and over many hours. It depends on the alcohol contents of the drink, amount of ice added, and the number and type of organisms in the ice, for example. Simpler said, if you're drinking at a bar, chances are the bar will close before your drink is safe.

6. Canisters and special taps in hotel rooms labeled "safe to drink" are not necessarily safe to drink. These are often present in hotels in developing countries. Water from canisters (re-filled from tanks wheeled down the hall) and from the special taps requires optimum disinfecting, proper storing, clean and intact pipes, and, very important, continuous electric power, frequently not present in such countries.

7. Tie a bright ribbon around the tap in your bathroom to remind yourself not to drink the water. Where sanitation is good, tap water is safe for brushing teeth and such. The amount of water swallowed is small.

However, where sanitation is suspect, drink boiled water. Carry an electrical coil, a current converter and a socket adapter, available in traveler' supply catalogues and on the web. Allow water to boil for a few seconds (yes, seconds). This kills all organisms. Where boiling is not feasible, tap water too hot to touch is "pasteurized," and virtually always safe. Such water remained heated for a sufficient length of time, in the heater and in the pipes and in the time to cool it, to kill organisms.

8. Pass up fruit drinks sold by street vendors. The drinks are tempting, cool, inexpensive, and made from various combinations of appealing fresh fruits. Alas, opt for humdrum but safe canned fruit drinks, sodas, bottled water and boiled beverages. Fresh fruit drinks are often squeezed in nearly impossible-to-clean, equipment, diluted with tap water, and may contain ice.



(Continued on back panel)