Yael Adler: The Fuel of Life – Water Is Boring? Big Mistake!

Yael Adler is a dermatologist and author of numerous health books. In her current book *"Brilliantly Nourished"*, she explains why water, of all things, keeps both body and mind young—and which types of water you might be better off avoiding.

Have you seen *Cast Away*? In that movie, Tom Hanks plays a FedEx employee who ends up stranded on a deserted island in the South Pacific after a plane crash. Without access to food or drinking water, he must quickly learn to survive in nature.

The human body can go several weeks without food—but not without water. After just a few days, a lack of fluids leads to death. Water is the main component of all living beings. It's in every cell of our bodies and therefore plays a central role. It regulates temperature, lubricates joints, participates in all metabolic processes, and is an essential transport, solvent, and diluting medium.

Nutrients such as sugars, minerals, and certain vitamins dissolve in water; proteins, fats, and carbohydrates are broken down into usable components and transported to the cells. Water is also vital for our body's own "purification plants": five to six liters of blood flow several hundred times a day through the kidneys, cleaning about 1,700 liters daily.

Water contains many important minerals. Iron supports energy metabolism and blood formation; potassium is needed for heart and muscles; calcium for bones and teeth; and chloride and sodium maintain acid–base balance.

An adult's average daily need under normal conditions is about two to three liters. Roughly 20–30% of this can come from food—soups, fruits, and vegetables contribute around 0.5 to 0.7 liters. The body also produces about 0.4 liters through metabolism. For the rest, it's up to you—by drinking, preferably water, fruit, or herbal tea.

Yet, according to a Forsa survey, every second person fails to meet the recommended daily intake of 35 milliliters per kilogram of body weight. In a 2019 study, urine samples from 600 adults were analyzed over a week: almost one in ten were dehydrated on four or more days per week, and about one in three occasionally.

Because water is vital for so many functions, dehydration has serious consequences. The body draws water from tissues and blood, nutrients are transported less efficiently, and the kidneys excrete less—allowing toxins to

accumulate. There's evidence that long-term dehydration may promote dementia; older adults often become acutely confused when dehydrated. Heart disease, metabolic disorders, and kidney problems can also result.

A hormone called the antidiuretic hormone plays a key role. It acts like an emergency insurance policy—when water is scarce, it ensures retention by reducing urine output. It also indirectly stimulates the release of the stress hormone cortisol, raising blood pressure and the risk of heart attack. Poor kidney and bladder flushing can lead to painful stones or infections. It may also disrupt blood sugar regulation, increasing the risk of overweight and type 2 diabetes.

So, the question remains: **when, how often, and what kind of water should you drink?**

Whether you prefer tap water or bottled sparkling water, warm or cold, is up to you—each option has pros and cons. If plain water is too dull, try flavoring it with cucumber slices, lemon wheels (unsprayed, please), ginger pieces, or mint leaves.

The key is to drink regularly throughout the day to maintain hydration. **Drink before you feel thirsty**—thirst can already signal the onset of dehydration. A drinking plan or keeping a bottle or teapot somewhere visible can help. Tech-savvy people might use a reminder app.

A glass of water about 30 minutes before a meal can aid digestion—it moistens the stomach lining and primes the digestive system: stomach acid and enzymes start preparing for food. Starting with water can also help with weight control by reducing hunger.

Cold water is particularly refreshing in hot weather or after physical exertion; it cools the body and is absorbed faster because it empties from the stomach more quickly. Warm water, on the other hand, can stimulate digestion and metabolism, ease the body's temperature regulation, dilate blood vessels, and promote circulation. It can also have a soothing effect, especially for stomach troubles or colds.

Which Water Is Best?

When shopping for water, we face a dizzying array of choices: table water, spring water, mineral water, local brands, even water from the South Pacific (like Fiji Water)—ranging from still to sparkling.

- **Table water** is essentially drinking water that has been industrially processed—often tap water enriched with minerals and carbon dioxide.
- **Spring water** comes from underground sources like mineral water but doesn't need to contain specific mineral levels.
- **Natural mineral water** originates from deep, protected underground sources and must be bottled at the source. It naturally contains minerals such as calcium, sodium, iron, and sulfur, as well as potassium, chloride, bicarbonate, fluoride, silica, manganese, and zinc.

Mineral water can only be minimally altered—removing iron or sulfur and adding carbonation is allowed. Carbonation enhances flavor by emphasizing the minerals and makes the water more refreshing. It also inhibits bacterial growth, extending shelf life.

However, if you suffer from acid reflux or gastrointestinal issues, still or tap water may be better. You might also consider **healing water (Heilwasser)**—a special form of mineral water classified as a medicinal product rather than a food. It has a particularly high mineral content, having passed through many rock layers from rainfall to collection.

The Power of Minerals

Minerals and trace elements are essential for life—they build cells, tissues, bones, and teeth and enable proper muscle and nerve function. Some minerals give water a harder taste; less concentration makes it softer.

To help prevent osteoporosis, calcium-rich mineral waters are recommended—look for levels above 250 mg of calcium per liter. During sports or heavy sweating, we lose key minerals; chronic deficiency can lead to muscle weakness, cramps, or bone loss.

Sodium adds a slightly salty taste and, together with potassium, regulates the body's water and acid–base balance. Losing too much sodium through sweat can cause circulatory collapse.

Sulfates may leave a bitter taste but, together with calcium, can have anti-inflammatory effects and stimulate digestion—though too much can cause frequent bathroom trips.

Some mineral waters even contain small amounts of **lithium**, a substance used medically to treat cluster headaches or bipolar disorder. In trace amounts (around 1.7 mg/L), it functions as a trace element. Studies suggest that people who drink lithium-rich water tend to be happier, less aggressive, and more fertile. Interestingly, even fruit flies live longer with small lithium doses—through genetic regulation and enzyme inhibition mechanisms.

Sources: Yael Adler; *FOCUS Health* 39/2025