

Vitamin Waters

Catherine Saxelby 

Nothing natural or health-giving about these



Products reviewed:

Glaceau Vitamin Water (Coca Cola)

Nutrient Water (Natureau)

Vitamin H2O (Aqua Pura – Bickfords)

*Smart Water (Spring Valley –
Cadbury Schweppes)*

The hype

Their labels promise so much – “focus”, “energy”, “recharge”, along with a long list of vitamins that just must be doing us good!

With names like “Vitamin Water” and “Nutrient Water”, the average shopper would think they’re getting something healthy that will pick them up and give them more vitality.

In reality these flavoured drinks are nothing more than “artificial concoctions” of sugar and additives, in my opinion.

To prove my point, just read the list of ingredients (if you can – it’s in a pretty small font size). There’s water, then fructose (which is fruit sugar), sucrose (ordinary cane sugar), followed by three food acids (citric acid, mono-potassium phosphate, di-potassium phosphate), flavour, vitamins (C, Niacin, Pantothenic acid, B6, B12), colour (fruit and vegetable juice), magnesium lactate, calcium lactate.

Despite their fancy names, the real technical description says it all:

“Formulated beverage”
or
“Vitamin-enriched flavoured water”



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Serve size

All come in tall 500ml bottles which equates to 2 glasses and is too big for one serve for the average female. With our overweight sedentary society, we need SMALLER serves, not larger.

Larger bottles only encourage you to consume more – even if you're no longer thirsty and have "had enough". Research shows that the larger the serving size, the more we consume.



Large bottle size (like Coke Buddies), passive overeating and kilojoule-dense fare all contribute to excessive consumption and ultimately overweight and obesity. We aim to eat what's in front of us! Apart from water and dilute drinks like Sports Waters, small sizes are better. See how the current serve sizes compare (note 1 glass = 250ml):

Soft drink	375ml can
Coke Buddy	600ml bottle
Orange juice	250 ml glass bottle <i>or</i> 500ml plastic bottle
Flavoured milk eg Moove, Oak, Dare	300ml carton <i>or</i> 500ml plastic bottle
Energy drink eg Red Bull, V	250ml can
Sports Drink eg Powerade, Gatorade	600ml bottle
Sports water eg Mizone, Powerade Sports Water	600ml bottle
Vitamin water eg Vitamin Water, Nutrient Water, Smart Water	500ml bottle



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Sugar

Vitamin waters have 5 to 7% sugar (all added) which is half the concentration of soft drinks (11 to 12%). So they're lower in sugar concentration but this reduction is negated by the sheer volume of the bottle. You get 500ml rather than the 370ml in a standard can. While this is less than those huge 600ml Buddies that pass as a 'single serve' of soft drink these days, you still end up consuming around 6 teaspoons of sugar.

500ml bottle vitamin water (5% sugar)	25g sugar	6 teaspoons sugar
375ml can soft drink (11% sugar)	41g sugar	10 teaspoons sugar
600ml Buddy (11% sugar)	66g sugar	16½ teaspoons sugar

Given that the average woman should consume only around 45g sugar (11 teaspoons) daily, which represents 10 per cent of daily kilojoules, one 500ml bottle vitamin water lands her with over half her day's intake.

How the sugar concentration compares

Vitamin waters have half the sugar found in soft drinks and juices and are on a par with sports drinks. You'll find the percentage sugar on the label under the Per 100ml column of the Nutrition Information Panel.

Percentage sugars in drinks

Soft drink	10-11%
Orange juice	8-11%
Pineapple juice	12-14%
Flavoured milk	8%
Energy drink	11%
Sports drink	5-6%
Vitamin water	5-7%
Sports water	2.5%



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Caffeine

Two of the waters have added guarana – a source of caffeine derived from a vine native to South America. Nutrient Water contains 84mg caffeine which is the same level as in energy drinks or one cup of instant coffee. The label says it's 'natural caffeine' but it's not clear what this means (caffeine in coffee could be called 'natural' too as it's from coffee beans).

There's guarana and taurine added as well – ingredients that you'd find in caffeinated energy drinks like Red Bull and V. Nothing natural here.

Flavours and colours

These drinks come in soft pastel attractive colours which would appeal to women, just as the alcopops Breezer and Cruiser do. You'll see berry colours, soft greens, warm yellows and pretty pinks.



Vitamin Water Revive says its colour is "fruit and vegetable juice" which is hard to fathom. If that's correct, then why isn't the juice listed as an ingredient rather than down the end of the list in the tiny quantities of an additive?

Nutrient Water Energy contains carotene as its colour which is the yellow-orange colour of carrots and pumpkin. It has a good safety record - no problems with that one.

Smart Water's Jump Start Tahitian Lime has two colours - 102 is tartrazine and 133 is Brilliant Blue FCF. Both these artificial colours have had question marks hanging over them for some years now and are excluded from elimination diets that check for food sensitivity. Since the publication of the UK Southampton study, there have been calls to have them banned from foods aimed at children.

Added vitamins

All have the same B vitamins added – niacin (B3), pantothenic acid (B5), B6 and B12. It's unclear why they don't have vitamins thiamin (B1) and riboflavin or (B2). Two have vitamin C added; one also has vitamin E.



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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Per 500ml bottle

Quantity	Vitamin Water Revive	Smart Water Tahitian Lime	Nutrient Water Energy	Vitamin H2O Cranberry Pomegranate
Energy	469kJ 112 cal	585kJ 139 cal	493kJ 117cal	272kJ 65cal
Protein	0	0	0	0
Fat, total	0	0	0	0
Saturated	0	0	0	0
Carbohydrate sugars	27g 27g	33g 33g	29g 29g	16g 15g
Sodium	5mg	25mg	0	0
Niacin B3	2.1mg	-	5mg	2.5mg
Pantothenic acid B5	1.0mg	-	2.5mg	0.52mg
Vit B6	0.3mg	0.4mg	0.8mg	0.40mg
Vit B12	0.4ug	0.5ug	1ug	0.50ug
Vit C	33mg	-	-	10mg
Guarana	-	50mg	25mg	-
Caffeine	-	NA	84mg	-
Vit E	-	-	-	1mg

Figures from nutrition panel of the label supplied by manufacturers as at Sept 2008. NA means Not Available



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The bottom line

These drinks can hardly be called natural. They're about as far from natural as any mass-produced manufactured food can be. They are simply "artificial concoctions" - the product of a factory, neither grown nor reared outdoors.

What I object to most of all is the implied benefits from the words on the label "revive", "smart water", "energy", "enjoy vitamins", "recharge your batteries", "defense" and "vitamins and antioxidants" and the listing of vitamins, guarana, taurine, cranberries or pomegranate. All designed to give the buyer the impression that here is something good and healthy that will give tired over-worked consumers a pick-me-up.



The most offensive is "We took it from nature" – don't know about you but I've never seen a bottle of flavoured drink growing on a tree any time I've been bushwalking!

They're marketed as a health-giving alternative to sugary soft drinks but they're nowhere near as healthy as the label would have you believe.

Together these all give the impression that there's something extra in these drinks over and above ordinary drinks – which there isn't. Any lift you get in energy levels is simply due to the sugar and caffeine hit.

I like the fact that they're lower in sugar but why call them "waters" when they have 5-7% sugar, the same as a sports drink like Powerade. "Water" implies that there's nothing else except water plus a few vitamins thrown in – which is far from the truth.

Regard them as a cross between a sports drink and an energy drink. They've got the sugar level of a sports drink but the vitamins and caffeine of an energy drink!

Read it in the news

To read a Sydney Morning Herald/The Age newspaper report with quotes from Catherine, go to.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/health-claims-for-drinks-are-hard-to-swallow/2008/09/20/1221331276542.html>

