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What Is It With Our Drinking Water?

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There has been a lot of talk about drinking water in the news lately. You may be wondering why. The answer is not as simple as it sounds, so let's talk about it!

The amount of water on our planet has not changed since the beginning of time and over the years it has become more contaminated. Experts started examining our water quality in concentrations of parts per million (ppm); this equates to one pound of contaminants to one million pounds of water. As technology has improved, they are now able to measure contaminants as small as parts per trillion; this equals one-second of 32,000 years. Being able to test this minute size of a unit has allowed the experts to learn about the tiniest contaminants that have been hidden in our water.

With these advanced testing tools, the most recent contaminants that have been found present in our water are known as pharmaceutical and personal care products (PPCPs). These contaminants end up in the water from daily tasks, such as washing our hands, bodies, laundry, and from food prep. This type of contamination in our water is so small, and previously undiscovered, that the experts don't know whether they present a problem yet.

PFAS

One of the pollutants that has gotten a lot of talk lately are known as "forever chemicals", or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). These substances are everywhere and likely everyone has some sort of PFAS in their body. There are two prominent PFAS that are found in our food, soil, and in the air, that are considered more dangerous to consume, these are called PFOAs and PFOSs. PFOA is linked to Teflon products and PFOS is associated with Scotchgard.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is in the process of regulating these two contaminants. They are recommending four parts per million for drinking water, however due to the size of these particles it is challenging for laboratories to measure them. The EPA is still in the process of testing the toxicity of these PFAS and attempting to determine which ones are unsafe. They are also trying to phase out the use of PFAS in products, however this could take years. In the mean time, there is advanced technology being developed to help break down PFAS into their basic form, plus everyday treatment technologies that are able to remove PFAS from water supplies.

Microplastics

Another contaminant that has been in the news recently is microplastics. This type of contaminant is everywhere in our lives, including our clothing. The major issue with microplastics is they don't decompose when thrown away. Even worse, the sun breaks them down into tiny virus/bacteria size pieces known as nanoparticles. Although the research of these nanoparticles is limited at this time, they have been found in human blood and organs. And, more recent research has discovered upwards of 240,000 of these particles in one bottle of bottled-water

Plastics are so abundant and rooted in our modern society that we're finding microplastics in the bottom of the ocean. Scientists are looking for ways to eliminate plastic waste. One idea is to break them down to their primary form. They are also researching how bugs and organisms could eat the plastic to help cut down on the waste. Additionally there has been a movement to eliminate plastics in general; such as stopping the use of single-use plastic bags and bottles.

In conclusion, 100 of the 85,000 contaminants are currently being researched and are continuously examined by toxicologist. To help reduce the amount of contaminants that infiltrate our water in the future we must take action now and learn about safer products for our environment.

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