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end of this sentence). And the parasite's hard outer shell protects it from the chlorine that's used to kill most microbes in water. Drinking-water regulations are designed to reduce—but not necessarily eliminate—*Cryptosporidium*, so even water systems that meet government standards may not be free of the parasite.

What else might your drinking water contain? Everything from pesticides like atrazine to a possibly cancer-causing gasoline additive called MBTE. If that makes you nervous, here are three things you can do:

- try to figure out what's coming out of your faucet (see "What's in Your Tap Water?" p. 4),
- buy a filter (see "Filter *This*," p. 5), or
- switch to bottled water (see "Hitting the Bottle," p. 6).

[1] *Epidemiology 8*: 615, 1997.
[2] *J. Epidem. Comm. Health 54*: 45, 2000.
[3] *Epidemiology 9*: 126, 1998.
[4] *Amer. J. Pub. Health 87*: 1168, 1997.
[5] *Epidemiology 9*: 134, 1998.

Joe: please note

COMING CLEAN

Should companies that bottle water offer consumers the same detailed reports of contaminants that public water utilities must? Yes, says the Food and Drug Administration. No, says the bottled-water industry. If you think consumers have the right to know what they're drinking, you can help by signing and mailing this coupon or writing your own letter.

To: Joseph Levitt, Director
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
Food and Drug Administration
200 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20204
oco2@cfsan.fda.gov

(3 voters)

From: Doug Munro + Kate Nahan Family
1151 E. Nevada St.
Ashland, Oregon 97520

Consumers have the right to know what's in their bottled water. As a member of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, I support the FDA's proposal that bottled-water manufacturers be required to make available detailed reports of contaminants, just as public water utilities do. All bottled-water labels should also disclose where the water comes from.

97N-0436

EXTRA PRECAUTIONS

- **To minimize your exposure to lead and other metals:** Use only water from the cold-water tap for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula. Hot water is likely to contain more lead and other metals. If the tap hasn't been turned on for six hours or more, run the water until it gets as cold as it's going to get. That helps flush out any metals that may have accumulated.

- **To minimize your exposure to trihalomethanes and parasites:** Boil your drinking water for at least one minute in an open pot, then let it cool down. That will vaporize any trihalomethanes and kill any *Cryptosporidium* or other parasites. If you don't use the water right away, refrigerate it.

- **If you have a severely weakened immune system:** There's not enough evidence to say that you should avoid tap water, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). But if you want to take "extra precautions," the CDC says to boil your tap water for at least a minute in an open pot or filter it with a system that is certified to reduce cysts (*Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*) under ANSI/NSF Standard 53 (for a list, contact NSF International—see "The Water Works"). You can also drink bottled water that has been distilled or run through a reverse-osmosis filter.

- **If you drink only bottled water:** Your teeth may not be getting enough fluoride, even if you use a fluoridated toothpaste. Tell your dentist, who may prescribe fluoride supplements, especially for children.

C130

NIBBLES

■ Don't panic over a recent study claiming that eating **tofu** at least twice a week raises the rate of **brain aging**. The study had limited data on the participants' diets and couldn't rule out other factors that might have made tofu-eaters more vulnerable to mild declines in thinking ability. *Even* if tofu affects the brain, the study suggests that its impact is small. Age, education, and history of a stroke explained 28 percent of the differences in test scores of thinking ability. The authors estimate that eating tofu might account for less than one percent.

J. Amer. Coll. Nutr. 19: 207, 242, 2000.

■ Nuns who had **Alzheimer's disease** lesions upon autopsy were more likely to have had low levels of **folate** in blood samples that were taken years earlier. But it's not known whether the folate deficiency contributed to the disease, whether the disease caused the deficiency, or whether folate supplements might slow or prevent Alzheimer's or other dementias.

Amer. J. Clin. Nutr. 71: 859, 993, 2000.

KNOW YOUR NUMBER

Move over cholesterol, triglycerides, HDL, and LDL. Now there's yet another number to get checked when you go to the doctor. High-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP), which is a sign of inflammation within the body, can help predict your risk of heart disease, say researchers at Harvard Medical School.

Paul Ridker and co-workers collected blood samples from more than 28,000 apparently healthy postmenopausal women. Over the next three years, 122 of the women had a heart attack, stroke, angioplasty, or coronary bypass. Ridker's team then compared blood samples from those women to samples from 244 similar women who had no heart problems.

Those who started out with the highest hs-CRP levels were four times more likely to have heart disease than those with the lowest levels. That was even true for women with desirable LDL ("bad") cholesterol (under 130).

High cholesterol levels, says Ridker, "tell us about a person's propensity to develop plaque, but they don't tell us which plaques are likely to rupture."

Plaques that rupture lead to heart attacks and strokes, and whether a plaque ruptures depends on inflammation.

The bottom line: both men and women should get their *high-sensitivity* C-reactive protein checked. (A test for *ordinary* CRP—often done to diagnose arthritis—can't detect inflammation at low enough levels.) Cholesterol-lowering statin drugs and anti-inflammatory drugs like aspirin both help prevent the risk of heart attacks, in part by reducing inflammation.—*Bonnie Liebman*

New Eng. J. Med. 342: 836, 2000.

WHOLE GRAINS & DIABETES

Why ask for that sandwich on whole-wheat bread? People who eat whole grains have a lower risk of diabetes, say researchers at the University of Minnesota and elsewhere.

Lawrence Kushi and colleagues gave diet questionnaires to nearly 36,000 healthy Iowa women aged 55 to 69 when the study began in 1986. After six years, 1,141 of the women had been diagnosed with diabetes.

Those who consumed the most whole grains (average: 3 servings a day) had a 21 percent lower risk of diabetes than those who consumed the least (average: once a week). Those who consumed the most fiber (average: 10 grams a day) from breads, cereals, and other grains had a 29 percent lower risk than those who consumed the least (average: 3 grams a day). (Fruit and vegetable fiber wasn't linked to diabetes.) And those who consumed the most magnesium, a mineral found in whole grains, had a 24 percent lower risk than those who consumed the least.

"Being overweight is clearly an overwhelming risk factor for the development of diabetes, and physical activity is important, too," says Kushi, who is now at Columbia University.

"But there is growing evidence that whole grains also play a role. It's just hard to know whether it's their fiber, magnesium, or something else that matters."—*BL*

Amer. J. Clin. Nutr. 71: 921, 2000.

Illustration: Loel Barr.