

Care and Cleaning of Water Bottles



Whether it's a sporting event or a day at the office, many people can be seen carrying water bottles. And while people may think they're doing a good deed for the environment when they reuse water bottles for anything from orange juice in a bagged lunch to a week's worth of water refills from the office water cooler, recent research suggests that we need to take care when using and cleaning water bottles.

Two common types of water bottles

Water bottles that are commonly used are of two types: the clear plastic bottles that are filled with water and purchased at the grocery or market; and the plastic bottles made of thicker plastic (often opaque) that are sold empty for use as beverage containers.

Clear plastic water bottles. Clear plastic bottles that are filled with water or juice and purchased at the grocery or market are not designed to be reused. These bottles do not stand up to the wear and tear of repeated use, and a recent study suggested that washing this type of water bottle to clean the inside and remove germs might accelerate the break-down of the plastic, potentially causing harmful chemicals to leach into the water.

Although plastics experts contend that the clear plastic bottles are safe when used as intended, the plastic used to manufacture single-use soft-drink and water bottles, polyethylene terephthalate (PET), does break down over time. So while it may be tempting to refill this type of water bottle, it's really best to recycle the bottle when you are done.

Plastic beverage containers. Thick plastic beverage containers, such as those sold by Rubbermaid™, are composed of a sturdier plastic than the single-use bottles and can be reused. However, care still needs to be taken in properly cleaning and handling these containers. A recent study of sports water bottles at an elementary school found that they were loaded with germs – a reminder that sharing of water bottles is never a good idea!

Washing and sanitizing reusable water bottles

Here are some easy steps to follow if you use a water bottle for work or play:

- Wash the water bottle daily with soap and warm water. Rinse with clear water, and drain thoroughly.
- Allow the water bottle to dry thoroughly overnight.
- If you don't have a sink handy in your office, store the water bottle in a refrigerator at the end of the day so that germs won't grow overnight.
- At least once a week, follow the washing and rinsing with a sanitizing step. Sanitize with a dilute bleach solution by rinsing the inside of the bottle with a dilute bleach solution. Use 1 teaspoon bleach per quart of water. Allow the bottle to thoroughly air-dry after washing and sanitizing.

And overall, remember that the Dietary Guidelines do recommend that consumers drink water as part of a healthy diet.