

Coconut Water For Health And Healing

by Bruce Fife, N.D.



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What is the healthiest beverage you can drink? Fruit juice? Milk? Sports drinks? Herbal tea? It may come as a surprise to you, but one of the healthiest beverages is coconut water. Most people respond to this statement with, "what the heck is coconut water?"

You've been to the grocery store, picked up a coconut, and shaken it, right? The sloshing sound you hear inside is coconut water. Contrary to popular belief, this liquid is not coconut milk. Coconut milk is made by crushing and squeezing the liquid from coconut meat. What you get is a thick, creamy, white fluid that looks much like dairy milk. Coconut water, on the other hand, looks pretty much like ordinary water, although it may be slightly opaque. The two are completely different in taste, texture, nutrient content, and health benefits. Coconut water is sometimes referred to as coconut juice and is consumed just like any other fruit juice.

Coconut water has a slightly sweet, somewhat nutty taste. Surprisingly, it doesn't taste like coconut. It has a flavor all its own. Coconut water has long been the most popular beverage consumed in the tropics where it is considered not only a refreshing drink but a health tonic. Coconut water is a superfood filled with minerals, vitamins, antioxidants, amino acids, enzymes, and growth factors. It is low in fat and has only a fifth of the sugar found in most fresh fruit juices.

Its unique combination of nutrients gives it incredible health-promoting properties. Coconut water has a normalizing effect and gives the body a boost of energy so that it can overcome a number of health-related conditions. It is effective in relieving dehydration,

fatigue, constipation, and other digestive disturbances, kidney and bladder disorders, and vision problems such as glaucoma and cataract. It is reported to turn back time, so to speak, by reversing or slowing down the aging process. Coconut water also has an alkalizing effect on the body, helping to counteract or balance the effects of acidifying foods which are so common in our diets. Research shows that coconut water can improve blood circulation, lower elevated blood pressure, and reduce risk of heart attacks and strokes. Studies have been so impressive that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States has approved coconut water to carry the claim that it "may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke."

One of the most remarkable characteristics of coconut water is its chemical profile and mineral content. The primary minerals or electrolytes in coconut water are essentially the same as those found in human blood. For this reason, doctors have used it as an intravenous fluid for rehydration, pumping it directly into the patient's bloodstream. Numerous studies dating back over 60 years document the successful use of intravenous coconut water in the treatment of malnutrition and dehydration.

Since coconut water has a pleasant taste, it has also found use as an effective oral rehydration beverage. Doctors have found it to be highly useful in fighting dehydrating diseases such as cholera, dysentery, and influenza, where it has saved the lives of thousands of children in underdeveloped parts of the world.

Coconut water's similarity to body fluids and its usefulness as an intravenous and oral rehydration fluid has spurred interest in the sports community. With properties which are in many ways superior to commercial sports drinks, coconut water is now becoming popular as a natural rehydration beverage among athletes. In fact, it is popularly known as "Nature's Gatorade."

Coconut water is available at most good health food stores and, as its popularity continues to grow, is finding its way into many grocery stores. It comes packaged in easy-to-carry cans, bottles, and tetra paks. Tetra paks are the most convenient because you don't have to worry about them breaking. You can take them with you anywhere, even when you work out, go camping or hiking, or go to the football game. If you freeze them beforehand, they will stay cold for hours, providing you will a cool, refreshing drink later in the day.

You can also get coconut water straight from a fresh coconut. You want to make sure you get a "young" coconut. Young coconuts are those that have not fully matured. The water in the mature brown,

hairy coconuts you see in the grocery store is too old and tastes much different. Whole young coconuts are also sold in health food stores. They look different from the mature brown coconuts. When a coconut is harvested from the tree it is covered in a thick fibrous husk. The husk is usually removed before being shipped to market, so you never see the husk, just the brown shell. Young coconuts, however, have only a portion of the husk cut off, leaving about an inch covering the shell. The husk is white and often shaped like a large toy top, with a point on one end and flat on the other. They are perishable, so you will find them in the refrigerated section of the store.

Nutrient Content in Gatorade, Powerade, and Coconut Water (value per 100grams)				
Nutrient	Units	Gatorade	Powerade	Coconut Water*
Sugar	g	5.33	6.02	3.71
Dietary Fiber	g	0	0	1.1
Calcium	mg	1	2	24
Iron	mg	0.20	0.25	0.29
Magnesium	mg	1	5	25
Phosphorous	mg	9	2	20
Potassium	mg	14	13	250
Sodium	mg	39	22	105
Zinc	mg	0.26	0.06	0.10
Copper	mg	0.25	0.25	0.04
Manganese	mg	0.05	0.05	0.142
Selenium	mcg	0.0	0.0	1
Fluoride	mcg	34	62	trace
Vitamin C	mg	0.4	0.4	2.4
Thiamin	mg	0.011	0.011	0.030
Niacin	mg	0.22	1.54	0.08
Pantothenic acid	mg	0.055	0.055	0.043
Vitamin B-6	mg	0.022	0.153	0.032
Folate	mcg	0.0	0.0	3
Amino Acids	mg	0.0	0.0	785

*Unlike commercially produced beverages, natural products like coconut water do not have a precise chemical profile. All values listed here are averages of samples tested. These values will vary somewhat due to age, variety, and growing conditions. Source:USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference(2006)

The information in this chart was taken from Dr. Bruce Fife's book *Coconut Water For Health and Healing*.