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Designer drink claims hard to swallow

by **Lindsey Nelson**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Beautiful skin. Lasting energy. A strong immunity system. In the old days, these could only be achieved with a healthy diet, plenty of exercise and perhaps some good genes. But today, health-conscious people may only need to pop open a can to get all three.

In keeping with the American craze for one-stop solutions, the newest line of designer drinks is claiming to cure people's health woes and fulfill their nutritional needs, all while tasting great and looking pretty.

Two brands at the forefront of this movement are Glaceau VitaminWater and Borba Nutraceuticals, although they represent separate ends of the spectrum.

VitaminWater is basically a grown-up Gatorade with sass. It offers nutrition without the high-fructose corn syrup that is omnipresent in most commercial drinks. The packaging is doused with clever blurbs bathed in neon color only slightly brighter than the beverages themselves. Each flavor brings a different state of being, with drink names like "Calm" or "Energy."

If VitaminWater is a diet-challenged, hip twenty-something on the go, then Borba Nutraceuticals is a neurotic thirty-year-old hell-bent on finding the fountain of youth. It comes in three promising flavors - Age Defying (açai Replenishing (lychee) and Clarifying (pomegranate), and is housed in a bottle that is probably more suited for high-end shampoo.

Then there is the issue of taste. While it can err on the sugary side, VitaminWater is generally delicious (the "Perform" flavor notwithstanding). My personal favorites are the dragonfruit-flavored "Power-C," which is reminiscent of a Capri Sun at the height of its glory, and the apple-raspberry "Defense," which, like Apple Jacks, doesn't taste much like apples. Unfortunately for Borba, the zero-calorie sweeteners are definitely detectable to discerning drinkers, and for those who can't taste the chemicals, all that's left is a slightly watered down version of Kool-Aid.

They're not cheap either. VitaminWater is a cool \$2, while Borba checks at \$2.50. If you were to drink as much Borba as its website recommends two bottles a day for 28 days - you'd be shelling out a whopping \$135 per month. The website claims that two of the flavors are "scientifically proven to get results (Replenishing and Age Defying). VitaminWater's website c



Some forms of Borba Nutraceutical waters are said to be age-defying.
PHOTO: Blaine Davis /WSN

not make this claim.

While the drinks may be a nice treat, their nutritional value is questionable. The claims made by the companies are not supported by available scientific evidence, and are basically a marketing gimmick, said Lisa Young, a nutrition consultant and an adjunct assistant professor at NYU.

Young said regular food is a much better source of nutrients than fortified beverages.

"Whole foods will also contain lots of other healthy constituents as well, you get a double bonus," she said.

Over-fortification of these drinks may make them seem like nutritional powerhouses, but actually, the extra nutrients are simply ignored by the body at best, according to Young.

VitaminWater offers more than 100 percent of the daily recommended value of Vitamin C. But this extra Vitamin C is not absorbed, and simply excreted by the body, Young said.

If the choice comes down to one of these designer beverages or a regular soda like Coca-Cola, Young acknowledges that the designer drinks are "very slightly better."

However, she said there is only one choice that wins hands down every time.

"You are better off with zero-calorie water," she said.

Perhaps the only special ingredient in these drinks is hype. •

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