

Another Kind of Water Safety

Suppose you're hiking with friends on a hot summer day, and you come to a sparkling stream of clear, cool water. The water in the stream looks so inviting, and you suddenly realize that you're thirsty. Should you take a drink from the stream?

The answer is as clear as the stream water: don't drink it! Most freshwater isn't safe to drink, even if it looks pure. Most mountain and forest water contains microorganisms—tiny living things—that you can't see but that can make you sick.

Your safety is optimized if you take your own water with you on outdoor adventures. If you can't carry all the purified water you'll need, though, you have some viable alternatives. You can boil freshwater to make it safe to drink. Boiling kills the harmful microorganisms, but it may not remove all toxins or dangerous chemicals from the water. It also requires that you carry heavy equipment such as a pot, a stove, and fuel.

You can also take along chemicals that kill germs in water. These chemicals make the water safe to drink, but they often give it a bad taste. Another method for purifying freshwater is to use filters, but experts caution people to choose carefully since not all filters make water absolutely safe to drink.

If you find yourself running out of water, you can conserve your "inner water" by staying out of direct sunlight, by covering your skin so that you don't lose as much water through perspiration, and by wearing a hat. Don't eat salty snacks, because these will increase your thirst.

In an emergency, if you have to drink untreated water, avoid water that is near shores. Drink from an upstream source of

water, if one is available, and beware of shallow water or water that has a bad odor. If you develop a stomachache a few days or weeks after drinking untreated water, visit a doctor to find out if you caught a disease from drinking contaminated water.

Wondrous, Wet World

A tropical rain forest is like no other place on Earth, with its dense canopy of trees and amazing variety of animal and plant life. Howler monkeys, boa constrictors, and giant spiders are but a few of the inhabitants of these lush forests.

If you were a weather forecaster for a rain forest, your job would be easy. You could give a consistent forecast for almost every day of the year. “Today’s weather will be hot and humid, with a ninety percent chance of rain.” Tropical rain forests are located just north and south of the equator, the imaginary line that appears as a belt around the globe.

Although tropical rain forests cover only about seven percent of the world, more than half of the world’s wildlife resides there. We don’t know for sure how many different plants and animals there are, though, because the rain forest is so inaccessible. Scientists are still discovering new animal and plant species in rain forests. In the Amazon rain forest, for example, scientists have counted at least two thousand species of butterfly, and on just one jungle tree, they found two hundred different kinds of ants.

Many rain forest animals live their whole lives in trees that can grow as high as two hundred feet. Animals such as colobus monkeys find everything they need in their lofty tree homes and rarely descend to the ground.

Rain forests are endangered and some are quickly disappearing, though. People are chopping down the trees for wood or burning the forests to farm the land. This means that the animals that live in the forests are also disappearing. Scientists worry that the destruction of the forests will have dangerous

effects on global weather patterns and that many plants that might provide valuable medicines will become extinct.

Fortunately, people around the world are working to preserve the rain forest ecosystems. You can help by learning more about these forests and sharing what you learn with others. If you avoid buying endangered rain forest animals or plants, or products made from them, you reduce the market for them. You can also find out what different groups are doing to save the rain forests and consider helping them. Your help can make a world of difference.

Food for Thought

Jay is growing up on a farm where almost nothing he eats comes in a wrapper. For example, for breakfast yesterday he had two eggs gathered from the henhouse and a peach he plucked from a backyard tree. For lunch, he ate a sandwich made with homemade bread, and for supper, he had squash and tomatoes picked from the garden and fish that his dad had caught.

Jay is aware of other ways of eating, though. He is familiar with the endless rows of snack foods on the shelves of the supermarket in town and the boxy restaurants that sell hamburgers and fried chicken to go. He doesn't understand why these are called "convenience foods," since you have to drive all that way to get them, when you could just walk to the kitchen and slice a piece of homemade pie or pick a plum off a tree in the yard. Jay thinks they should be called "inconvenient" foods because it takes so much more work to get them.

Last summer, he visited his cousin Ben for a week. "Are you hungry?" Ben asked on the day Jay arrived. Jay was indeed hungry after the long train trip, so Ben opened a huge bag of potato chips. In no time, Ben and Jay had eaten most of the chips.

Jay was surprised at how many chips he ate, but he was even more surprised at how hungry he still felt. As the week went by, Jay ate many other kinds of snack foods and fast foods. He couldn't exactly say that he liked the salty and sugary foods, but he found himself eating a lot of them, even when he wasn't hungry.

When Jay returned home and to his usual way of eating, he had a new appreciation for the fresh, homegrown foods his

family ate. He saw that it meant something to be connected to the food he ate, especially when it came to him from human hands instead of out of a bag.