

Home Water Softening

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is soft water?

Water naturally has a variety of minerals such as calcium and magnesium. Whether a water supply is considered “hard” or “soft” depends on how much of these minerals are in your water. Soft water contains lower levels of calcium and/or magnesium than hard water.

Do I need to soften my water?

There is no requirement to soften your water. The decision to soften is a personal choice that can affect your home and the environment. If your water’s hardness is greater than 7 grains per gallon or 120 mg/L, then you might need a water softener to ensure your appliances run well and to improve the taste, smell, or look of your water.

Understand the hardness of your water

To decide if you need a home water softener, learn about the hardness of your home’s water. You can measure the hardness of your water using a test kit or an independent laboratory. Search for labs at: [Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program](http://www.health.state.mn.us/labsearch) (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/labsearch>). If you get your water from a community water system, you can contact them directly for information about your water’s hardness.

Advantages of home water softening

- Prevents build-up of minerals (scale) on the inside of pipes, fixtures, and hot water heaters.
- Lengthens the life of some appliances.
- Reduces or prevents mineral spots on glassware.
- Prevents or reduces soap films and detergent curds in sinks, bathtubs, and washing machines.

Disadvantages of home water softening

- Can corrode your pipes. The corroded metal from the pipes can end up in your water. This can contribute to elevated lead and copper levels in drinking water.
- Potential health effects from additional sodium.
- Regular testing of the water and maintenance of the softener is necessary to make sure the softener is working properly.
- Negative impacts to the environment from salt use.
- The water used to regenerate the softener beads ends up as waste.
- Learn more at [Home Water Softening](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/softening.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/softening.html>).

If I have a home softener, how do I use it correctly?

Make sure you have your softener installed and maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions. Read the manufacturer's instructions before adding any chemicals to the unit. Maintaining your softener will keep your water quality stable. This will help prevent issues with corrosion. In addition:

- If you get your water from a community water system, check to see if your community already softens the water. Soft water provided by a utility does not need additional softening and may cause corrosion issues for your home.
- Make sure the softener is set to the hardness of your water supply. If the hardness is set too high, the softener will cost more to operate and waste water, costing you extra money.
- If your home has new copper plumbing, do not run the water softener for at least the first few weeks you use water at your house. This will help the plumbing form a protective mineral layer to reduce the risk of consuming excess copper. Learn more about [Copper in Drinking Water](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/contaminants/copper.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/contaminants/copper.html>)
- Ensure that the softener is filled with sodium or potassium chloride following the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Soften only what you need to. People often choose to soften showers, sinks, and laundry hookups. Toilets, hose bibs, basement sinks, and other cold water taps typically do not need to be connected to a softener. In many cases, people choose to soften only the hot water.
- Check your manufacturer's instructions for dealing with common issues like clogging, iron fouling, and bacteria and fungi. Learn more at [Home Water Softening](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/softening.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/softening.html>).
- Depending on your water quality, some softeners may be able to fully or partially remove additional minerals. These softeners may have special filter media and may cost more than typical softeners. Learn more at [Home Water Treatment](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/hometreatment.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/hometreatment.html>)

Additional resources

- [Chloride \(salts\)](https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/chloride-salts) (<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/chloride-salts>)
- [Home Water Treatment](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/hometreatment.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/factsheet/hometreatment.html>)
- [Water Softening](https://www.wrc.umn.edu/watersoftening) (<https://www.wrc.umn.edu/watersoftening>)

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To obtain this information in a different format, call 651-201-4700.