

## Where does my water supply come from?

Water companies collect supplies from rivers, reservoirs, lakes, streams and boreholes. Before water is supplied to your property it is treated to remove impurities and disinfected.

## Is my water supply clean and safe?

Water must comply with the stringent quality standards set out in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2000 (2001 for Wales). In 2006, 99.96% of all water samples passed quality tests.

## Who monitors drinking water quality?

Drinking water quality in England and Wales is regulated by the Government through the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI).

## What if my water doesn't smell or taste nice?

Sometimes you may taste or smell chlorine. There is usually no cause to worry. If the taste or smell is particularly strong and you can't drink the water, contact your water company. Enquiry and emergency numbers are listed under 'water' in the telephone directory.

Any of the following could cause people to notice a slight smell or a taste in their drinking water:

- The use of chlorine as a disinfectant
- Seasonal changes
- Plumbing in your home

- Houses located near water treatment works

## Why can I taste or smell chlorine?

Chlorine is an effective disinfectant. To maintain disinfection throughout the water mains, small amounts are allowed to stay in the water. You can reduce this smell or taste by refrigerating a covered jug of water before drinking, as chlorine evaporates when water is left to stand. Use water that has been standing for longer than 24 hours on the garden.

## Do seasonal changes affect taste or smell?

Treatment removes most smells and tastes but during dry summers water may taste or smell musty or earthy.

## How can plumbing cause problems?

Substances from your plumbing may dissolve in tap water, which could cause strange tastes. For example:

- Metallic or bitter tastes come from copper, iron or galvanised pipes
- Plastic tastes from plastic pipes
- Rubbery or metallic tastes from tap washers

Only plumbing materials suitable for use with drinking water should be used and the tank in your loft kept clean and covered. Your water company or a plumber can help you determine if there is anything wrong with your plumbing. Don't drink or cook with water from a hot water system or bathroom taps because it usually comes from a



storage tank and isn't as fresh or safe as water from the mains.

### Why is my water discoloured?

Disturbance of deposits in the mains can cause discolouration. This can happen when the direction or speed of water flow changes, for example when a main bursts. Chalk deposits or excess air can turn water white. White water caused by excess air clears from the bottom up when left to stand.

### Why are there deposits in the mains?

Many water mains in England and Wales are cast iron, which may have corroded. In some areas, iron and manganese are present in the source water. Inadequate treatment may have deposited iron and manganese in the mains. These aren't harmful.

### What should I do if I get discoloured water?

If you and your neighbours notice that your water is discoloured, contact your water company. Save a sample in a clean plastic container or glass jar. If your neighbour's water isn't discoloured, your pipes may be the problem.

### What causes hard water?

Hard water contains minerals such as calcium and magnesium. Rain water is naturally soft and doesn't contain these minerals, but as it seeps through the ground it can absorb them.

### What are the problems with hard water?

Hard water causes pipes to fur up and scale to collect in kettles, irons and washing machines. It makes it more difficult to lather soap and it can leave marks on basins, baths and toilets.

### What can I do?

You could use a water softener. If you install one, ensure you have a supply of unsoftened water for drinking and cooking. Some studies suggest there is less heart disease in hard water areas. Many water softeners replace calcium and magnesium with sodium which can cause problems for premature

babies and people on a low sodium diet. If you decide to install a water softener, buy it from a reputable supplier who will advise you on the correct size. Have it installed by a qualified plumber.

### How does lead get into drinking water?

Lead occasionally occurs naturally in untreated water but plumbing in older properties is more likely to be the cause. The permanent remedy is for householders to remove lead pipes and fittings.

### Are there lead pipes in my home?

If your home has been modernised since 1970 and all the pipe work replaced from the water company's stop valve to the kitchen tap, your property should have no lead pipes. If your home was built before 1970, it may have lead pipes. The Drinking Water Inspectorate website ([www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk)) has tips on how to check whether you have lead pipes.

### Is there lead in my drinking water?

If your home has lead pipes, your drinking water may contain lead. Your water company may take a sample from your home if necessary, and will tell you the results.

### What can I do to reduce lead levels?

Replace any lead pipe work between the stop valve outside your home and your kitchen tap with copper or plastic pipes. Then ask your water company to replace its part of the service pipe between the water main and stop valve. Ask your water company about the cost. A simple precaution is running a bowl of water first so you are not drinking water that has been standing in the pipes.

#### What you can do now

- Check whether there are any lead pipes in your home.

*There is a range of printed fact sheets available from the Consumer Council for Water or visit [www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk).*