

# Sodium in Drinking Water

## What is Sodium?

Sodium is a mineral found naturally in the environment and in our drinking water.

The human body needs sodium to maintain blood pressure, control fluid levels, and for nerve and muscle functioning.

Sodium in drinking water is not a health concern for most but may be an issue for people with severe hypertension, congestive heart failure, or on a sodium-restricted diet.

## Sodium Testing and Reporting

Public Health must be notified when sodium levels in public drinking water exceed 20 milligrams per litre (20 mg/L). This information is then made available to residents and local physicians to help patients on sodium restricted diets control their sodium intake.

If you own a private well and are concerned about sodium, consider testing your water, especially if the well is located near a roadway where salt is used in the winter.

## Sodium in Your Diet

Most healthy adults should consume between 1200 - 1500 mg of sodium per day and keep their intake below 2300 mg per day, as recommended by Health Canada.

One half teaspoon of table salt has about 1,150 mg of sodium. The largest source of sodium in the diet comes from processed foods, snack foods, soups, condiments, fast food and restaurants.

Although less than 5-10% of the daily intake of sodium typically comes from water, the intake from this source could be significant in persons suffering from severe hypertension or congestive heart failure who may require a sodium-restricted diet. People with these conditions should consult their physicians if the sodium level in their drinking water exceeds 20 mg/L.

If the sodium level in your drinking water is 20 mg/L, then drinking two litres of water per day would contribute 40 mg of sodium to your diet. For healthy adults, this level of sodium is not a health risk. Even for people on sodium.

You can find out about sodium levels in public drinking water by visiting your local Municipality's website and reviewing the Drinking Water Annual Report which is updated each January.

## Water Softeners

Water-softening devices can add significant amounts of sodium to your diet. If you have a sodium-based water softener, use a separate, unsoftened water supply for cooking and drinking. You may also want to consider whether the water you're drinking is softened when working out at your local gym, when dining at a restaurant or at your place of employment.

## Removing Sodium from Water

Boiling water or using a charcoal filter (such as a Brita pitcher) will not remove sodium from your water. If you have a sodium-based water softener but cannot install a separate, unsoftened water line, you could install a reverse osmosis filter under your sink. You may also be able to use potassium instead of sodium in your water softener; however, elevated potassium intake may be a health concern for people with chronic conditions taking medications that affect potassium levels.

For more information on sodium in drinking water, contact Public Health at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4753.