

# Sodium in drinking water



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

## What is sodium?

Sodium is a common element in the natural environment and is often found in food and drinking water. In drinking water, sodium can occur naturally, be the result of nearby road salt application or water softening units. Sodium is needed in the human body to maintain blood pressure, control fluid levels, and for nerve and muscle function.

## What is an acceptable level of sodium in drinking water?

People use drinking water to drink and prepare meals, and it makes up a large part of a person's diet. The average sodium intake from drinking water depends on the source of your water supply (surface water or ground water). In Ontario, there is an aesthetic objective of 200 milligrams/litre (mg/L). Results over 20 mg/L must be reported to Public Health. Health Canada has determined that for healthy people, the daily "[tolerable upper intake level](#)" for sodium is 2300 mg/day, which includes sources found in food as well as water. Some areas in the Waterloo Region have higher sodium levels in the ground. Since groundwater is the most common source of water for Waterloo Region, it is not unusual to get sodium concentrations in drinking water above 20 mg/L. As sodium in drinking water provides only a portion of an individual's sodium intake in their diet, local sodium levels in drinking water should be taken into consideration for people on a sodium restricted diet.

## What are the health concerns of too much sodium in my drinking water?

Sodium in drinking water is not a health concern for most people, but may be an issue for someone with hypertension, congestive heart failure or on a sodium-restricted diet. Those on sodium restricted diets should consult their physician if the sodium in their drinking water exceeds 20 mg/L. The amount consumed is increased when people drink

or cook with softened water. Water softening devices can add sodium to your diet and it is advisable to use a separate, un-softened water supply for drinking and cooking to reduce sodium intake.

## How do I know how much sodium is in my drinking water?

Individuals that rely on private wells for their drinking water should have their drinking water tested every five years for sodium. This test is done through a private laboratory.

For individuals on municipal water supplies, sodium concentrations for neighbourhoods are available through the Region of Waterloo Service First Call Centre at 519-575-4400. Sodium levels are also included in the Region's Annual Water Quality Reports which can be found at [www.regionofwaterloo.ca/waterquality](http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/waterquality)

## How do I remove sodium from my drinking water?

Boiling water or the use of charcoal filters will not remove sodium from your water.

- If you have a sodium based water softener, a separate, un-softened water line should be installed for drinking and cooking.
- If this is not possible, a reverse osmosis filter could be installed.

Contact a licensed professional as they can advise you on appropriate devices and maintenance requirements to remove sodium from your drinking water supply.

More information, including age specific recommendations for sodium intake, can be found at Health Canada:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/sodium/index-eng.php>

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.

**Region of Waterloo Public Health  
and Emergency Services**

Health Protection and Investigation  
519-575-4400

**[www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph](http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph) • 519-575-4400 • TTY 519-575-4608 • Fax 519-883-2241**