



Tastes and odours in tap water

Water quality factsheet 1

If you notice that your water has an unusual taste or odour, it could be one of several different reasons. While it may be unpleasant, it's unlikely to be harmful.

It can be tricky to work out the reason for an unusual taste or odour. This factsheet explains some common reasons for tastes and odours and what to do if you notice them.

We take water quality seriously at South West Water. This is one of a series of factsheets about water quality – you can find more factsheets at southwestwater.co.uk

Regional differences in water

In the UK, we get our water from many different sources. These sources often give water a characteristic taste or odour that we get used to over a period of time. If you visit or move to a new area, you may find that you notice the difference in the taste or odour of the water.

Sometimes, water can have a different taste or odour even within the area covered by a single water supplier.

We treat and test all of the water we supply to make sure that your water reaches your home or workplace without unwanted tastes and odours. Research shows that most unusual tastes or odours are related to issues with plumbing or appliances in the home or workplace.

Chlorine, antiseptic, metallic or bitter tastes and odours

Chlorine tastes and odours

If you notice a faint taste or odour of chlorine in your water, it could be from the chlorine we have added to protect your tap water. This taste or odour is normal and will not harm you.



Why we add chlorine to water

We're required to add very small and safe amounts of chlorine to your water to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. We carefully monitor the levels that we add to make sure your water is always safe to drink and use.

Heating water can make the chlorine odour more noticeable, so you may notice the odour more when you run a bath or take a shower. Even though the odour may be stronger when you heat the water, it's still perfectly safe to use.

Finding a Water Regulations Advisory Scheme approved plumber

Approved plumbers can advise on the suitability of all plumbing pipework and fittings and the requirements of the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme (WRAS).

The Water Industry Approved Plumber Scheme (WIAPS) has a register of all approved plumbers. You can find out more about the scheme and get a copy of the register at the WRAS website wras.co.uk or by contacting us.

Other reasons for chlorine, antiseptic, metallic or bitter tastes and odours

If you're getting a very strong chlorine, antiseptic, metallic or bitter odour or taste, this may be caused by another problem not related to the chlorine we have added to your water. You will probably notice these types of tastes and odours more when you make a hot drink, especially tea.

This table on the next page describes some of the most common causes and how you can try to prevent the tastes and odours.

Fuel and chemical tastes and odours

Oily odours or tastes are usually caused because an oil, such as petrol, diesel, kerosene or paint thinners, has been spilt and has then leached into your water supply pipe.

If you suspect this has happened, don't drink the water and call us straight away on [0344 346 2020](tel:03443462020) (minicom [0800 169 9965](tel:08001699965)). We will then explain what happens next.

If fuel or oil is spilt on, or near to, any underground water pipes, it's important that the area is cleaned up immediately so the oil doesn't contaminate the water supply or the environment. Replacing pipework can be expensive, so cleaning up the spills before they're allowed to enter the pipework can help to minimise costs.

Earthy or musty tastes and odours

Untreated water may naturally contain algae and other organic matter. Our water treatment works remove most of these, but sometimes very low levels of organic matter remain in the water, leading to an earthy or musty taste or odour. They will not harm you at all, and the water is safe for you to drink.

Questions about your water supply

For more information about water tastes, odours and anything else to do with your drinking water supply, please visit www.southwestwater.co.uk/waterquality

Alternatively, please call us on [0344 346 2020](tel:03443462020) (minicom [0800 169 9965](tel:08001699965)).

Summary of the main causes and solutions to tastes and odours in tap water

Source of problem	Reason for odour or taste	Possible solutions
Washing machine or dishwasher cold water supply hoses	The material used to make the hose can cause a taste or odour in your water.	<p>Fitting a non-return or check valve between your water supply pipe and the washing machine or dishwasher hose will stop water returning from the hose into your water supply.</p> <p>This can often eliminate the taste or odour after a few days.</p> <p>We will provide non-return valves that are simple to fit and suitable for most appliances free of charge.</p> <p>To request a valve, please go to southwestwater.co.uk/waterquality or call us on 0344 346 2020.</p>
Flexible hoses used in plumbing, usually making connections under the sink	Flexible braided metal hoses are more often used in modern plumbing. The rubber or plastic lining inside them can sometimes cause an antiseptic taste.	If the flexible hose is part of your drinking water plumbing, you may need to ask a plumber to replace the hose with an alternative type of pipework that does not contain rubber.
Tap or stopcock washers	Rubber washers can sometimes cause an odd taste or odour, particularly if taps or stopcocks are new, old or haven't been used for some time. You will usually only notice the odour or taste when you use the particular tap causing the problem (unless it's the stopcock, which will affect every tap).	You may need to replace the washer. If the washer has been damaged because of a worn tap seating, you will need to replace the tap seating too.
Kettles	If you only notice the problem when you're boiling the kettle, it could be caused by rubber seals inside the kettle.	Try heating the water using your hob or microwave – if this gets rid of the taste or odour, you may need to replace your kettle.
New plumbing and pipework	New or modified plumbing can give your water an unusual taste or odour. This is caused when traces of copper and other materials come into contact with your water.	This will usually improve with time as a thin protective layer of natural scale forms on the new plumbing, sealing the copper.