

What to Do When You Have Bad Water at Home

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Alarm over the United States' [dirty water](#) crisis is growing.

But bottled water is [no better](#), and we should be [cleaning up our water supply](#) instead of bypassing it. Needed infrastructure improvements to U.S. water systems will take time. What do you do if your water is bad now?

First Things First

As many as [63 million Americans](#) may be right to fear their tap water. But the remaining 80 percent of the U.S. population has perfectly safe tap water.

Before spending money, find out [how safe](#) your community's water is. [In many cases](#), you will also want to test your home's water. Some problems may only require point-of-use treatment for drinking water; others may require point-of-entry, or whole house, solutions. The more you know about your water, the more effective your solution will be.

Lead

About [one-third](#) of the country's water districts still use lead supply pipes.

Home plumbing was built with lead into the 1980s. You can [have your home's water tested](#) to find out if any lead is leaching into it. Contact your utility to find out about supply pipes, but check for [lead pipes in your home](#) yourself.

Replacing lead pipes is expensive, but it is the safest course of action. There are [some federal grants](#) to help replace residential pipes. Check with your local utility to find out if incentives or local grants are available.

In the meantime, consider purchasing an [NSF/ANSI Standard 53 certified water filter](#) that is certified for lead removal. When lead supply lines are involved, as in [Newark, New Jersey](#), these may be available directly from your water provider.

Running the tap to flush out water that has been sitting in pipes can help if you have a corrosion problem, but will obviously waste a lot of water over time.

Bad Well Water

If you're on a well, [routine testing](#) will not only tell you about contaminants in your water, it will establish a record of water quality should events upstream affect your well water.

In places, as many as 90 percent of rural wells are [contaminated with manure](#) from

nearby farms. Your health department or nearby utilities can tell you about contaminants of concern in your area. Have your well tested for [these contaminants](#) regularly.

If your water fails health standards, contact your public health department for treatment recommendations. On-site [treatment processes](#) like disinfection, distillation, and filtration usually work, but always retest your water to verify treatment was effective. Depending on the contaminant, its concentration, and the condition of the well, you may need a new source of water.

Cleaning Up Your Taps

How you treat your home's water depends on the problem.

The CDC offers a [useful guide](#) to choosing a water treatment system. If you choose filtration, don't forget [maintenance](#) — change your filters regularly. Neglected filters can make water worse.

You might choose bottled water while you are installing the fix for your water problem, but bottled water is [not a long-term solution](#). Besides the long-term costs and waste generation, as well as the [presence of micro-plastics](#) in more than 90 percent of bottled water, it may [not even be safer](#) than what's in your tap.

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