

FACT SHEET: SODIUM IN DRINKING WATER

Most water contains some sodium which naturally leaches from rocks and soils. An excess of sodium in water may cause a salty taste or odor, as well as present long-term health effects. Sodium naturally occurs in both food and water with food being the more common source of sodium. Drinking water contributes only a small fraction (less than 10 percent) to the overall sodium intake. Sodium levels in drinking water can be increased by ion-exchange water softeners.

What are the regulations for sodium in drinking water?

There is currently no federal standard for sodium levels in drinking water. However, to protect individuals that are susceptible to sodium sensitive hypertension or diseases that cause difficulty in regulating body fluid volume, the following guidelines can be found on the website for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov).

For persons on sodium-restricted diets, sodium concentrations greater than 120 parts per million (ppm) could be problematic (i.e., could cause an increase in blood pressure) if sodium levels in water remained elevated for a significant period of time.

The EPA's Drinking Water Advisory Committee also recommends that the sodium concentration in drinking water not exceed a range of 30 to 60 ppm because of possible adverse effects on taste at higher concentrations. Concentrations below 30 ppm contribute less than 1.5% of the sodium in an average American diet and less than 2.5% of the present sodium guideline value, assuming consumption of 2 liters of water per day. For a concentration of 60 ppm, the comparable values are 3% and 5%.

In addition, the EPA requires public water supplies that exceed 20 ppm to notify local and state public health officials. This EPA guidance was developed for those individuals restricted to a total sodium intake of 500 mg/day and should not be extrapolated to the entire population.

Sodium limits in other states

Indiana has adopted the federal drinking water standards, which do not set a limit on sodium. However, some states do include sodium limits in their drinking water standards for public water supplies to protect those on sodium-restricted diets. These limits vary from state to state. For example, Florida has set the limit at 160 ppm for public water supplies. New Jersey sets the limit at 50 ppm, while Maine sets it at 20 ppm. The New York standard states that water containing more than 20 ppm of sodium should not be used for drinking by people of severely restricted sodium diets and water containing more than 270 ppm of sodium should not be used for drinking by people on moderately restricted sodium diets. For patients on restricted diets, it is recommended to consult their physician regarding their specific sodium intake.