



BRITISH WATER

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# Information on water treatment in the home

## FACT SHEET 2

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### SOFTENED WATER AND HEALTH

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#### **Sodium (Salt)**

The relationship between sodium intake and increased risks of heart and blood pressure problems remains subject to debate within the medical profession. Research continues with some recent publications suggesting that reduced-salt diets may not contribute significantly to reducing coronary disease. However, the government, via the Food Standards Agency, promotes the need for a general reduction in salt intake with our food.

Sodium is contained in much of our everyday diet, especially snacks and processed foods, and it is quantified on many product labels. Water softening introduces a low level of sodium into the water and softened water will satisfy the Water Quality Regulations in all but the few areas of very hard water with greater than 435 mg/l of hardness (calcium carbonate). The average amount of sodium in softened water is only a fifth of that in semi-skimmed milk and processed foods can contain up to 20 times more sodium than softened water.

Some people prefer to use and drink softened water; its use to prepare drinks and food can improve flavour and appearance. **A NOTE OF CAUTION:** There are two specific situations, however, where the use and drinking of softened water is inadvisable:

- In the reconstitution of infant formula powders, as softened water could affect its fine nutritional balance; and
- for anyone on a medically prescribed low sodium diet.

It is for these reasons and to allow for personal choice that, when installing a water softener, a mains water tap should be fitted, as described in the Water Fittings Regulations and consequently recommended in the British Water Code of Practice for Installation of Water Softeners. This tap also enables the water company to sample the unsoftened mains supply as part of their routine testing.

#### **Eczema and skin problems**

Over the years, many eczema sufferers have reported that the use of softened water has substantially reduced inflammation. Softened water is also known to have a calming, soothing effect on other skin problems, including psoriasis, but such benefits have not been formally established, although recent research by a leading UK dermatologist identified a strong link between hard water and childhood eczema.

#### **Minimum hardness**

The incidence of cardiovascular disease is slightly higher in populations with a NATURALLY soft water supply than where the water is moderately hard. Artificially softened water is chemically different from naturally soft water and there is no evidence that it has a similar effect.

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