Taste and odour of drinking water

The majority of the water in the United Utilities region comes from upland surface water reservoirs in the Lake District, Pennines and North Wales. However, some water is abstracted from rivers, canals or from groundwater aquifers.

Water contains a number of naturally occurring minerals such as calcium, magnesium and iron. The varying concentrations of these minerals gives the water a particular taste and you may notice a difference if you have recently moved to a new area. This is entirely normal.

Chlorine

Chlorine is added to drinking water as the final stage of treatment in order to kill any harmful germs that may be present. A small amount of chlorine remains in the water right through to your tap. Chlorine concentrations vary throughout the day and time of year. Occasionally, chlorine concentrations are increased to deal with operational problems. The chlorine levels in the water are closely monitored 24 hours a day. A slight taste of chlorine is normal, but some people are more sensitive to the taste and smell than others. The chlorinous taste can be reduced in water by filling a jug, covering it and allowing the water to stand in the fridge until required for use. Any water not used after 24 hours should be discarded but can be used to water plants so as not to waste it.

Earthy or musty taint

Water that passes through peaty land can have an earthy or musty taste and/or odour. The water treatment works in such areas are designed to remove the organic material that causes these tastes. Several types of bacteria and algae, that are normally present in lakes, reservoirs and rivers naturally produce the substances responsible for these off flavours. Some of these organisms can also grow on washers and the inside of taps or long lengths of pipe giving rise to similar problems.

Rubber or plastic

Certain plumbing materials that come into contact with the water supply can give rise to an unpleasant taste and or odour. When water stands within the plumbing system, small amounts of substances may dissolve from the pipes. Rubber and plastic hoses used to fill drinking water tanks or vending machines and hoses to washing machines and dishwashers can give rise to a variety of tastes and odours such as rubbery, plastic, metallic, dry, musty, or reminiscent of swimming pools. If you notice the taste in hot drinks such as tea or at a particular time of day, this is most likely the case. If you have a washing machine or dishwasher plumbed into pipework under the sink, try closing the valves and seeing whether the problem persists. If so we recommend that you fit a single check valve between the cold water pipe and flexible hose. These can be purchased from plumber’s merchants and DIY stores. Ensure that the valve is Water Regulation (WRAS) approved. If you are unsure a qualified plumber will be able to advise you, visit watersafe.org.uk to find an approved plumber in your area.

Bitter

A metallic or bitter taste can arise from copper, iron or galvanised pipes. If the water has been standing for several hours in the pipe fill a washing up bowl with water to draw fresh water through the pipe. The water in the bowl can be used for watering plants and need not be wasted. Occasionally glasses or cups that have been through a dishwasher may retain traces of detergents. As a test, try rinsing the glass or cup with tapwater and see whether the taste persists. If so, adjust the settings on your dishwasher and use no more than the recommended amount of detergent and rinse-aid.

Petrol or diesel

If there is a petrol or diesel taste and/or odour to the water from your kitchen tap please telephone our customer service centre. Please do not drink the water or use it for cooking purposes until one of our inspectors has visited your property.

Your water quality

If you’re interested in finding out more about the quality of your drinking water, please visit unitedutilities.com/waterquality and enter your postcode. We’ll tell you where your water comes from, together with other information such as its hardness.
About us
United Utilities is the North West’s water company. We keep the taps flowing and toilets flushing for seven million customers every day. From Crewe to Carlisle, we work hard behind the scenes to help your life flow smoothly.