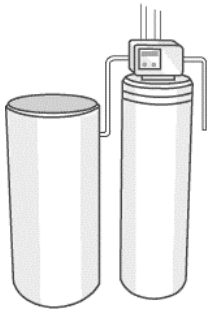




## Do You Need a Water Softener?

Are you spending too much time scrubbing the white scaly deposits from your showers and sinks? Are your dishes and glassware covered with unsightly water spots? Do you use more shampoo or laundry soap than you think you should?

Hard water is the primary culprit of each of the household problems listed above. The U.S. Geological Survey Office estimates that 85 percent of American homes have problems with hard water, so the question is, do you need to take action?



Many consumers have hard water, notes Tom Bruursema, general manager for the Drinking Water Treatment Unit program at NSF International, an independent organization that tests and certifies water treatment products. “While hard water is not often an indicator of health concerns, it can be a nuisance.”

Softened water can require less soap, detergent or shampoo to adequately lather and clean. It also is less likely to cause spotting on dishes, and it can reduce scaly lime and mineral deposits on sinks and showers. From a long-term standpoint, soft water can increase the life span of household pipes and appliances by reducing harmful lime deposits. However, the hard water measurement in many households falls within an acceptable range.

“Hard water is determined by the amount of calcium and magnesium that is present,” Bruursema explains. “These minerals are generally measured in grains per gallon (gpg) or parts per million (ppm).” Hard water can start to become a problem for many consumers when the hardness level detected exceeds 6 to 7 gpg (or 100-120 ppm). Bruursema suggests contacting your local water utility for a recent water quality report. Or, if you have a private well, have your water tested by a state-certified testing lab. If your water registers high on the hardness scale, you may be in the market for a softening system.

Here are some additional questions to ask as you consider various products:

- Does the unit regenerate according to use or on a timed schedule? If home water use is higher on certain days than others (i.e. if you do all your laundry on the weekend), consider a unit that regenerates based on use.
- What is the grain rating of the unit? Softeners vary in terms of the amount of grains of hardness they can effectively handle between regenerations. The number of people living in the household combined with the grains per gallon present in the water can help the consumer determine the grain rating needed.
- Does the unit have an efficiency rating? Efficiency ratings mean that the unit meets minimum criteria for salt and water usage.
- What is the warranty on the softener unit and its components?
- Is leasing an option? Renting a unit may be more cost effective for consumers who rent their home or who plan to move within three to five years.
- Is the unit certified by an independent testing organization? Product performance and safety are not easily determined by the consumer, and certainly not before the product is purchased and installed. Selecting those that have been independently tested and certified, of which there are many, alleviates this problem. NSF International currently certifies a wide variety and large number of water treatment systems, including water softeners. For a list of certified products, consumers can visit the NSF website at [www.nsfconsumer.org](http://www.nsfconsumer.org) or call 1-800-673-8010.