

Tap Into Healthier Water

Use a filter to protect your family against potential water contaminants.

BY JENNIFER MEDLEY

Home water filters not only improve taste and minimize dependency on bottled water; they also protect your family from what's lurking in drinking water. Unhealthy pollutants that bypass traditional treatment facilities can cause illness or disease, and have even been linked to cancer. Not all tap water is unsafe, but it's prudent to check.

Municipal water is sampled regularly, and most towns are required to test for 80 contaminants, according to Dr. Jeffrey Morrison, a detox specialist and founder of the Morrison Center, an integrative medical facility in New York. Still, "there are tens of thousands of different contaminants out there that could potentially end up in our water source, with new ones surfacing every day," he says.

What's in *your* water? The Environmental Protection Agency recommends people connected to a public water system request a copy of their municipality's annual water quality report, which lists the levels of any contaminants detected during monitoring. Morrison cautions, however, that "depending on the age and condition of pipes, the water coming out of the faucet can differ from the water that is pumped into

the home." If you'd prefer to test for additional impurities, enlist the help of a local water company or buy a do-it-yourself kit, such as the one by Watersafe (\$20, www.drugstore.com). Anyone with a private well should consider having its water tested annually by a state-certified lab.

If you do want to buy a filter, select the right one by doing some background work and assessing your water quality. Filters come in all shapes, sizes and prices—but be sure to choose one approved by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF), which certifies filters that effectively reduce at least 93% of a targeted contaminant. Read product instructions carefully, and maintain the filter according to the manufacturer's specifications, otherwise higher levels of contamination could actually result.

The targeted contaminants listed for each type of filter will vary. Shower and hang-on-the-spout bath filters help address chlorine and other toxins absorbed by the skin and lungs. However, "the first place to start is the kitchen tap," Morrison says. "And you don't want to just filter the water you're drinking, but also the water you're cooking with."

Water Filter Options

FILTER TYPE	HOW IT WORKS	TARGETS	PRICE	PROS	CONS
Carbon Filter (pitcher, faucet or under-the-sink)	Flushes water through activated carbon, which catches contaminants	Bad tastes and odors, certain pesticides and herbicides, chlorine, benzene, sediment, industrial solvents and radon	Starts at \$30, replacement filters extra	Inexpensive; easy to install	Not effective in removing bacteria, arsenic, nitrites or lead
Distiller (countertop or whole house point-of-entry)	Boils water into steam, then a separate chamber condenses it back into water, leaving behind impurities	Arsenic, bacteria, barium, fluoride, sodium, and heavy metals such as lead, mercury, chromium, copper and cadmium	Starts at \$150, replacement filters extra	Ensures removal of heavy metals	Expensive; energy-draining; also removes healthy minerals; doesn't eliminate chlorine and pesticides
Reverse Osmosis (under-the-sink)	Purifies water through a semi-permeable filter membrane	Most contaminants (except radon and certain pesticides)	Starts at \$300, plus replacement membranes	Comprehensive; good for private wells; membrane only needs to be replaced every few years	Expensive; wasteful: flushes away a few gallons of unpurified water for every gallon purified; space consuming
Ultraviolet Disinfection (under-the-sink)	Ultraviolet light kills the culprits	Bacteria and parasites such as giardia and E. coli	Starts at \$150	More energy efficient than most under-the-sink models	Addresses limited pollutants