

Are water softeners bad for your health?

Dear Dr. Gott: I reside in an independent-living complex. When it was built in 2001, they put soft water throughout our water system on both the hot and cold faucets. Could this cause problems such as high blood pressure, neuropathy, dementia and more?

Many of the residents have had to take pills for high blood pressure and were never on them before. Some of these people are more than 70 years old. Many of our residents are in the early stages of dementia and Alzheimer's.

It is scary knowing that possibly the salt water in our water system could be causing these problems.

A faucet in the basement of our building isn't connected to the system, so residents go there for a supply. The complex owner says he checked with a doctor who says the amount of salt in the water would not be harmful to us. Do we have a chance of having a real problem here? Should the water be changed?

Dear Reader: Hard water causes a buildup of chemicals in household pipes, stains sinks, discolors laundry and dries out skin following bathing.

That said, the National Research Council has gone on record stating that drinking hard water does not pose health risks. While I don't know what the condition of the water is in your area, obviously the owner of your complex determined that installing a water-softener system was the best way to go financially in the long run.

The amount of sodium added to any system depends on the hardness of the water, but treated water doesn't appear to add any significant amount of salt to the diet.

Generally speaking, an 8-ounce glass of treated water contains less than 13 milligrams of sodium. The average adult without a history of hypertension requires between 1,500 and 2,400 milligrams of sodium each day. With a history of high blood pressure, the recommended amount holds at 1,500 milligrams.

A more likely cause of excessive sodium comes from a person's



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tains 230 milligrams of sodium. Adding to that many processed foods, cold cuts, canned goods and soups brings the potential for excessive salt consumption far above the recommended daily allowance.

There is an association between Alzheimer's dementia and aluminum. Perhaps this is to what some of your residents refer.

I cannot find any confirming reports of memory loss, Alzheimer's or neuropathy caused by water-softening systems. A more likely consideration is that the residents of your establishment are aging and are developing diseases and disorders common to an advanced age. That said, it appears that by making a trip to the basement for drinking water, residents who fear potential side-effects can bypass the problem. I also would recommend that residents request sodium tests be added to their next routine lab work when they visit their physicians.

Providing they eat a healthful diet and do not cook with or add salt to their meals, this will be one surefire way to resolve one of the issues.

Because of the concerns you raise, I am sending you copies of my Health Reports "Hypertension" and "Alzheimer's Disease." Other readers who would like copies should send a self-addressed stamped No. 10 envelope and a \$2 check or money order for each report to Newsletter, P.O. Box 167, Wickliffe, OH 44092-0167. Be sure to mention the title(s) or print an order form off my website at www.askdrGottMD.com.

Write to Dr. Gott in care of United Media, 200 Madison Ave., Fourth Floor New