

## Taste, Color, and Odor

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### **My water is brownish in color, what should I do?**

If your water is brownish or rusty in color, the cause is likely iron. Iron in drinking water is not a health risk but can cause discoloration and is often the result of aging iron pipes. Water distribution systems often have iron pipes that are known to have fragile iron scales. During water main breaks or construction, interruption of normal water flow and disturbance of pipe walls may release the iron scale and cause discoloration.

Discoloration from iron is usually temporary and should disappear after water is flushed from the distribution system or your home plumbing. The City of Brookings Water Department recommends that you not drink discolored tap water. In addition, do not wash clothes when water appears rusty, because the rust can cause fabric stains. Flushing your cold water tap for 15 minutes should clear up discolored water. If it does not, contact the Water Department at 541-412-0424.

### **Why do I sometimes see work crews flushing fire hydrants?**

The City's Public Works crews flush hydrants for routine system maintenance, fire flow testing and when repairs are needed. Flushing removes unwanted sediment that builds up in the hydrant and distribution system over time. The discoloration that is sometimes visible when hydrants are first being flushed is due to the sediment build-up. If you watch the entire process, you will notice that the water clears up rather quickly.

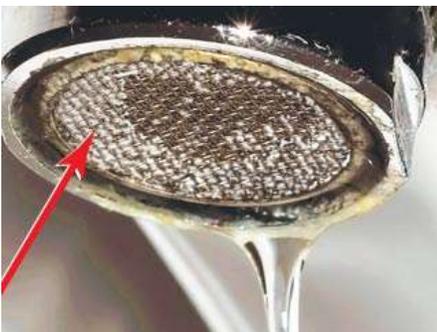
### **Why does tap water sometimes look milky or cloudy?**

Milky or cloudy water is often caused by air that enters pipes and escapes in the form of oxygen bubbles when water leaves your tap. Cloudiness and air bubbles do not present a health risk. During colder months, water in outside pipes is colder and holds more oxygen than your household pipes. Consequently, when the cold water enters your building and begins to warm, the oxygen bubbles escape and cause the water to look milky. Construction in the distribution system can also allow air to enter the pipes and cause the appearance of cloudy water.



Cloudiness and air bubbles should naturally disappear in a few minutes. You can test this by running the water into a clear container and observing for a few minutes. If the water clears from the bottom to the top of the container, air bubbles are rising to the surface. If the cloudiness does not disappear, contact the Water Department at 541-412-0424.

### **All of the strainers in my faucets are clogging with white particles. What could this be?**



Aerators are strainers that attach to your faucet or showerhead and break up the flow of water as it leaves your tap. Aerator screens can collect particles found in water and should be routinely cleaned throughout the year and replaced once a year. Particle build up is often white and comes from a variety of sources.

The most common source of build up in aerators is from the hot water heater. The hot water heater dip tube is made of a nontoxic plastic material called polypropylene. This plastic can break apart or disintegrate and travel in hot water to your faucet, eventually collecting in the aerator.

Dissolved calcium is naturally found in our drinking water and can naturally change to calcium carbonate in hot water heaters. Over time, calcium carbonate may accumulate at the bottom of the hot water heater and collect in aerators.

To determine whether the material is calcium carbonate or polypropylene, place the material in a small amount of distilled vinegar. If the particle begins to "bubble" within a few minutes or is mostly dissolved within 24 hours, it is likely calcium carbonate. If no bubbling occurs or the particle does not dissolve, it is likely polypropylene.

If you are experiencing a calcium carbonate problem, we recommend flushing the hot water heater. Contact a plumber or download instructions for draining your hot water heater.

If you are experiencing a polypropylene problem, contact the manufacturer of your hot water heater.

### **Why do I sometimes see black particles in my tap water?**

The common cause of black particles in tap water is the disintegration of rubber materials used in plumbing fixtures. Plumbing gaskets and o-rings disintegrate over time and can collect in toilet tanks and around faucets. Similar problems are common in newly constructed or renovated buildings.

If you have filters attached to your plumbing system or a water pitcher that uses carbon filters to remove contaminants, these can also contribute to the presence of black particles. The small carbon particles of these filters are black and can pass through in your water. Black particles can also come from precipitated iron and manganese in water, which may come loose from pipe walls after a large main break or major construction.

Flushing the system and your taps will likely resolve the issue of black particles caused by plumbing fixtures or construction. If black particles are from your filter, you should replace the filter as recommended by the manufacturer. If the problem continues after flushing and you have determined that the source is not a rubber gasket or filter, please contact the Water Department at 541-412-0424.

### **What is the white residue I occasionally find on cookware, in the shower and in ice cubes?**

White residue is commonly found in showers and kitchenware as the result of dissolved minerals found in water, such as calcium and magnesium. Mineral particles can also be visible in ice cubes made with tap water. These minerals are not a risk to human health but can build up on surfaces over time. Commercial products are available to remove white residue caused by minerals in water.

### **Sometimes I smell an odor coming from my water tap. What could this be?**

An odor in the area of your water tap is very likely coming from the sink drain and not the water. The plumbing beneath your sink, typically the u-shaped pipe, can collect debris over time and create an odor at your tap. If you smell an odor, fill a clean glass halfway with tap water and smell the water in a separate room or outdoors. If the odor is no longer present, the odor is likely from the plumbing beneath your sink. We recommend pouring bleach or a disinfection product down your drain to remove any debris and odor.

### **What can I do if my water smells and tastes like chlorine?**

The City's Water Department disinfects its drinking water with chlorine to ensure protection against contaminants throughout the distribution system and in your home. The Water Department routinely collects and analyzes samples throughout the City to ensure chlorine levels are at or below our target level. However, at times customers may notice an increase in chlorine taste and odor. Chlorine odor is often an indicator that the disinfectant is effectively working to remove bacteria and debris in your pipes.

If you notice chlorine odor, the Water Department recommends flushing your cold water taps for 5-10 minutes over three consecutive days to eliminate the odor and remove any bacteria and debris. If you experience a chlorine taste, the Water Department recommends collecting and refrigerating cold water for drinking after running your cold water tap for at least two minutes or after another high water use activity such as bathing or washing clothes. Use clean, sterile (dishwasher-safe) bottles or pitchers for collecting cold tap water and refrigerate it in an open container. Within a few hours, the chlorine taste and odor will disappear and the water will be conveniently cold for drinking. If a chlorine odor continues after flushing, contact the Water Department at 541-412-0424.