THE HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO WATER TREATMENT

What actually fixes it.

Your water report shows what's in the water arriving at your home. This guide explains the systems that fix it — what each one does, what each one can't do, and how to choose — so you can weigh your options with confidence and pick what's right for your home.

START HERE

There are only two places to fix water

At one tap

POINT OF USE · UNDER THE KITCHEN OR BATHROOM SINK

Treats only the water you drink and cook with. Reverse Osmosis (RO) purifies water up to 99% — fresh, clean cooking and drinking water at the kitchen sink, with no plastic bottles to buy. Many homes add one at the bathroom sink too: brush your teeth with clean water, and pour a midnight glass without a trip to the kitchen.

Where water enters

POINT OF ENTRY · WHOLE-HOME, AT THE MAIN LINE

Treats every tap in the house — showers, bath, laundry, kitchen — right where water enters your home. This is where water softeners and whole-home carbon filtration live.

The complete fix is usually one of each: whole-home treatment for the water you feel and smell, plus Reverse Osmosis (RO) at the sink for every glass you actually drink.

WHY IT MATTERS

What shows up in Virginia, DC & Maryland tap water

From utilities' own testing, compiled in the EWG Tap Water Database.

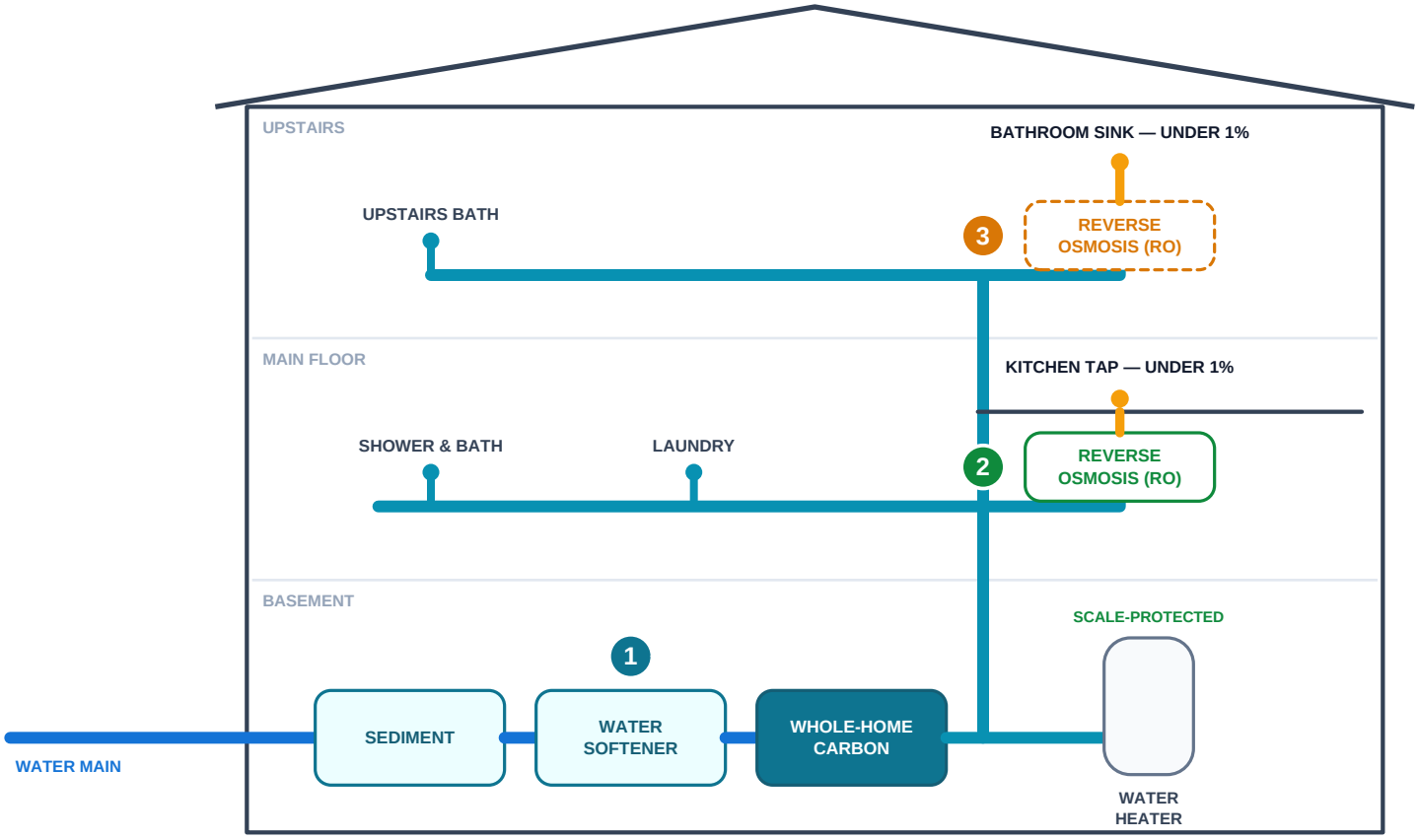
- **Disinfection byproducts**
  Cancer-linked byproducts of chlorinating river water
- **Chromium-6**
  The 'Erin Brockovich' metal, carbon can't touch it
- **Nitrate & nitrite**
  Acute risk to infants; carbon does nothing
- **PFAS**
  The 'forever chemicals' — they build up in the body
- **Lead**
  No safe level for kids — found in older home plumbing
- **Hardness**
  Dry skin, dull hair, scale, appliance wear

Your free water report lists which of these your utility actually detected — and how far above the health guideline each one runs.

THE MAP

Where everything goes in your home

One picture: the whole-home stage treats every tap — Reverse Osmosis (RO) finishes the taps you drink from.



1. **The whole-home stage —** softener + carbon + sediment where water enters — every shower, every load of laundry, every tap runs treated water.

2. **Reverse Osmosis (RO) at the kitchen —** the water you drink and cook with, taken down to under 1% — no plastic bottles to buy.

3. **The bathroom-sink upgrade —** clean water for brushing teeth, and the midnight glass without a trip downstairs.

Popular upgrade: a second Reverse Osmosis (RO) tap at the bathroom sink — brush your teeth with it, and a middle-of-the-night glass of water never means a trip back down to the kitchen.

THE TOOLBOX

The four systems, side by side

What each one actually does — and the gap each one leaves.

Already using a pitcher filter like Brita, or a fridge filter?
It's built mainly for chlorine taste and smell. The makers' own tests show little or nothing for the byproducts, chromium-6, nitrate, or PFAS — unless that exact model is specially certified for them.

Activated carbon

Under-sink, countertop, or whole-home stage

ONE TAP — OR EVERY TAP AS A WHOLE-HOME STAGE

A thick block of carbon, far bigger than a pitcher cartridge. As water passes through, chlorine and its byproducts stick to the carbon and get pulled out — taste, smell, and shower steam all improve.

Doesn't touch: Chromium-6, Nitrate & nitrite, Hardness — dissolved minerals slip straight through. PFAS only with specially-rated carbon.

Water softener

Whole-home · ion exchange, uses salt

EVERY TAP — EVERY SHOWER HEAD & BATHTUB

Swaps out the calcium and magnesium that make water hard. Every tap, every shower head, every bathtub runs softer water — the fix for scale, soap scum, dry skin, dull hair, and stiff laundry.

Doesn't touch: Not a chemical filter — nothing for byproducts, chromium-6, nitrate, or PFAS. A different job; many homes need both.

Reverse Osmosis (RO)

Under the kitchen or bathroom sink

ONE TAP — KITCHEN OR BATHROOM

Pushes water through a membrane so fine it traps what other filters can't — typically 95–99%+ removal, leaving under 1%: the byproducts, chromium-6, nitrate, PFAS, and lead, all at once.

Trade-off: Treats one tap, not the whole house — which is why it pairs so well with a whole-home system.

The complete system

Softener + carbon + Reverse Osmosis (RO)

WHOLE HOUSE + KITCHEN DRINKING STAGE

Everything above, combined: softener, carbon, and sediment stages where water enters, plus a Reverse Osmosis (RO) stage at the kitchen. Every tap covered — drinking water under 1%.

Why it leads: Whole-house for what you feel and smell, Reverse Osmosis (RO) quality for every glass you drink. Every row on your report, handled.

HOW HOMEOWNERS DO IT

Three ways to set it up

No two houses are the same — your system is sized and priced at your free in-home checkup. No cost, no obligation.

GOOD

Reverse Osmosis

Protect the water you drink and cook with

Best for: Renters, smaller budgets, or anyone who wants clean drinking water first.

BETTER

Whole-Home Filtration

Cleaner water at every tap in the house

Best for: Homes where the chlorine smell and the shower, skin, and laundry matter as much as the kitchen.

MOST COMPLETE

Combined System

Every tap covered, drinking water to under 1%

Best for: Homeowners who want it all, clean water at every tap, and Reverse Osmosis (RO) quality water to drink and cook with.

THE PROOF

Which filter removes what

Based on NSF/ANSI certifications and the makers' own published test results — not ads. Source: EWG Tap Water Database (June 2026).

✕ Not removed · ◐ Some models · ✓ Removed well · ✓ Almost all (<1% left)

CONTAMINANT	Pitcher / fridge filter ONE POUR AT A TIME	Activated carbon ONE TAP	Water softener EVERY TAP · SHOWERS & TUBS	Reverse Osmosis (RO) KITCHEN OR BATH TAP	Complete system WHOLE HOUSE + KITCHEN
Disinfection byproducts TTHMs, haloacetic acids, chloroform	◐	✓	✕	✓	✓
Chromium-6 Hexavalent chromium	✕	✕	✕	✓	✓
Nitrate & nitrite Agricultural runoff	✕	✕	✕	✓	✓
PFAS 'Forever chemicals'	◐	◐	✕	✓	✓
Lead From older plumbing	◐	◐	✕	✓	✓
Hardness Calcium & magnesium / scale	✕	✕	✓	✓	✓
Chlorine taste & odor The 'pool water' smell	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓
Sediment, rust & iron Grit, staining, metallic taste	◐	◐	◐	✓	✓

The pattern: pitchers and carbon handle taste and the chlorine byproducts — but dissolved metals like chromium-6 and nitrate slip past them. Only Reverse Osmosis (RO) and the complete system close every gap.

YOUR RECOMMENDED NEXT STEP — FREE

Book your free Home Water Checkup

Your report shows what's in the water before it reaches your house. A licensed SwiftPro specialist tests what the report can't — then gives you straight answers on what's worth fixing, if anything. No pressure.

- **Water heater & tank —** scale quietly shortens its life
- **Water pressure —** hard on pipes when too high or low
- **Hardness + lead spot-check —** measured while you watch
- **Plain, simple advice —** what's worth fixing is your call

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