

Water fluoridation: It's beneficial, safe and saves money



Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease for adults and children in the U.S. Cavities and toothaches often disrupt people's lives, causing absences from school or work. In [a national survey](#), nearly 3 in 10 young adults said the appearance of their mouth and teeth "affects my ability to interview for a job."

Fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in lakes, rivers and groundwater. However, most water supplies do not contain enough fluoride to prevent tooth decay. This is why many local water systems add a little bit more.

Water with the right balance of fluoride prevents decay. When drinking water has the recommended amount of fluoride, it strengthens the enamel — the outer coating of teeth. This [reduces cavities by 25%](#).

Water and toothpaste with fluoride work together, much like seatbelts and airbags in a car. Fluoride toothpaste provides a higher concentration at key times of the day (such as bedtime). The fluoride in water helps keep a low level of the mineral in the mouth throughout the day.

Physicians, nurses and dentists strongly support water fluoridation. [The most respected voices](#) in health and medicine recommend fluoridation. These include the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dental Association and National Association of School Nurses.

Fluoridated water saves money for families and taxpayers. A 2016 study showed that each person in a fluoridated community saves [\\$32 per year](#). How? By reducing the need to treat decayed teeth. Updated for inflation, this savings is now over \$43 per person, per year.

Fluoridated water is safe. The [largest organization of pediatricians](#) says the safety of fluoridation is backed by "overwhelming evidence." The main concern that is raised about fluoride is whether it might be linked to lower IQ scores. A report by the National Toxicology Program (NTP) linked fluoride with lower IQ scores, but consider these key points:

- The NTP report did **not** link lower IQs with the low amount present in America's tap water.
- Most of the studies in the NTP report were from China, India and other countries where populations were exposed to greater amounts of fluoride than people are exposed to in U.S. tap water.
- A National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) review said the NTP report failed to provide "clear and convincing" evidence to back up its conclusions.

Studies from [Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, Spain and Sweden](#) show no link between fluoridated water and cognitive deficits. The New Zealand study is the only published fluoride study that tested IQs several times during each person's childhood and adulthood.

When fluoridation ends, tooth decay rises. Researchers have learned what happens when a city ends fluoridation. Calgary, one of Canada's largest cities, stopped fluoridation in 2011. But its city council reversed its decision after seeing [a significant rise in tooth decay rates](#). The rate of urgent dental treatment for Calgary children rose by 78% after the city ended fluoridation.

Preventive dental care is important, but it cannot "replace" fluoridation. Many people cannot afford regular dental care, and [68 million Americans](#) lack dental insurance. Plus, [56 million Americans](#) live in areas with a shortage of dental providers.