PATIENT EDUCATION

CLEAN WATER GUIDE

How to choose a water filter for your home

Filter the water you drink and cook with.

Water is one of the easiest places to lower your everyday toxin load. And no, your refrigerator filter usually doesn't count: most are designed to improve taste and reduce chlorine, not to remove the contaminants below.

"Legal" isn't the same as "safe"

Your water utility tests for the contaminants the EPA regulates, about 90 of them. Thousands of other chemicals in use today aren't regulated at all, and many legal limits haven't been updated in decades.

Our recommendation

- **Reverse osmosis (RO) is best** when you can install it. It removes the widest range of contaminants.
- **Renting?** A certified pitcher or countertop filter is a good start. Just change the filters on schedule.

WHAT'S IN TAP WATER & WHAT REMOVES IT

Contaminant	Why it matters	What removes it
Micro- & nanoplastics	Found in most U.S. tap and bottled water tested. Tiny nanoplastics can enter tissues and may affect hormone, heart, nerve, and immune health.	**Reverse osmosis** (best for nanoplastics); carbon block for larger microplastics
PFAS ("forever chemicals")	A 2023 U.S. Geological Survey study detected at least one PFAS in nearly half of U.S. tap water samples. Linked to immune, hormone, and cancer risks.	**Carbon block** or **reverse osmosis**
Chromium-6	Found in drinking water in all 50 states (EWG). Utilities generally aren't required to test for it. Linked to cancer and reproductive harm.	**Reverse osmosis** or certified ion exchange
Arsenic	A known carcinogen, from natural deposits and agricultural runoff. **Common in Arizona groundwater.**	**Reverse osmosis** or specialized adsorptive media
Lead	A neurotoxin that leaches from older pipes and service lines. No safe level, especially for children.	**Carbon block** certified for lead, or reverse osmosis
Pesticides & nitrates	Agricultural runoff, including atrazine, glyphosate, and nitrates. Linked to nerve, cancer, and fetal-development harm.	Pesticides: **carbon block**. Nitrates: **reverse osmosis**
Fluoride	Added to many municipal supplies. Some patients prefer to limit it.	**Reverse osmosis** (most pitchers and carbon filters don't remove it)
Radiological contaminants	Radium, radon, and uranium from natural rock can reach groundwater. Linked to organ damage and cancer risk.	Carbon helps; **reverse osmosis** is best

If You Choose RO: Add Minerals Back

RO removes beneficial minerals along with contaminants. Add a **trace mineral** product, or choose a system with a **remineralization stage**.

Skip the Plastic Bottles

Bottled water isn't a solution: most bottles tested contain microplastics. Store and carry filtered water in **glass or stainless steel.**

KNOW YOUR WATER

- **Look it up:** enter your zip code in the **EWG Tap Water Database** (ewg.org/tapwater), or read your utility's annual **Consumer Confidence Report** (water quality report).
- **Tucson & Arizona:** groundwater here often has naturally occurring **arsenic**, and some Tucson-area wells have had **PFAS** detections. On a private well? Get it tested.

FILTER TYPES COMPARED

	GOOD	GOOD	BETTER	BEST
Type	**Pitcher**	**Countertop**	**Under-sink (carbon, not RO)**	**Reverse osmosis (under-sink or whole-house)**
How it works	Small cartridge, usually carbon granules	Larger cartridge; carbon plus micro/ultra filtration	Usually 3 large multi-stage cartridges with carbon block and other media	Multi-stage system with a membrane that removes the widest range of contaminants
Pros	Inexpensive, portable, renter-friendly	Renter-friendly; filters more than a pitcher	More thorough thanks to multiple stages; long filter life	Most effective overall, including nanoplastics, arsenic, chromium-6, nitrates, and fluoride
Cons	Most don't remove chromium-6, arsenic, fluoride, nitrates, or nanoplastics	Same limits as pitchers	Same limits as pitchers	Wastes some water (newer tankless models are far more efficient). Removes minerals (see tip below).
Filter cost	$$$ over time	$$	$–$$	$–$$
Replace filters	About monthly	About every 3 months	Every 6–12 months	Every 6–12 months (membrane less often)
Brand examples	Epic Water, Zero Water, Clearly Filtered Less effective: Brita, PUR	Gravity-fed: Boroux Countertop RO: AquaTru Other: Aquasana	Separate faucet: Aquasana, Claryum Existing faucet: Clearly Filtered, Epic Water	Tankless: Waterdrop G3P600, Cloud RO Tank-style: Aquasana, iSpring

Brands are examples, not endorsements. Confirm certification for the contaminants you care about.

BUYING SMART

Check Certification

Look for **NSF, IAPMO, or WQA** testing:

- **42:** chlorine & taste
- **53:** lead, PFOA/PFOS
- **58:** reverse osmosis
- **401:** emerging contaminants

Confirm on the **performance data sheet**.

Replacement Filters Matter

Change filters on schedule. An old filter can stop working, or even release what it trapped.

Buy the original brand's certified filters. Cheap knockoffs usually aren't third-party tested.

Sources

USGS (2023) tap water PFAS study; EWG Tap Water Database; U.S. EPA drinking water regulations; NSF International standards; Qian et al., PNAS (2024). This handout is educational and not a substitute for individualized medical advice.