

## What's in the water?

### Opposition to water fluoridation grows with new research

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Carole Clinch doesn't drink the tap water in her Waterloo home anymore, and she hasn't for the better part of a year.

When she makes tea, she uses distilled water. If she goes out she always makes sure to find out what people are serving her.

That's because she believes tap water, and the fluoride in it, makes her sick.

Clinch said she's spent the last 12 years trying to figure out what was going on in her body. She was diagnosed with everything from chronic fatigue to fibromyalgia.

While a definitive diagnosis for her chronic pain continued to elude her, she struggled with symptoms like low body temperature and freezing in her hands and feet.

It was only after the local health educator, and peer reviewer of scientific articles, decided to do a little research herself that things began to change.

She happened upon a 2006 report by the National Research Council and her life changed almost overnight. The report described how fluoride exposure could be an endocrine disruptor.

She found drinking as little as a litre a day of fluoridated water can suppress thyroid functioning and lead to the symptoms that she was describing on her various visits to the doctors.

"I wondered if I was hypothyroid myself," said Clinch. "I thought it my be applicable to me."

Using the scientific method that is second nature to her professional life she began searching out potential health effects of too much fluoride in the body. It read like a laundry list of things that she was going through.

"I said OK, this is where we start girl," said Clinch. "Let's eliminate the fluoridated water."

So she started carting in water from her parents' Kitchener home, which doesn't have fluoridated water, and began a little experiment on herself. A year later she said she's never felt better, and has actually stopped taking the medications that had become a part of her daily routine.

"I eliminated all the fluoride sources and I was surprised at how fast it had an effect," said Clinch.

The 52-year-old local mother was able to eliminate the need for the thyroid hormones she was taking, and blood tests showed her thyroid functioning in the optimal range. A year later her hypothyroid symptoms have disappeared.

Clinch admits her lifestyle changes didn't just stop when she refused to drink anymore of Waterloo's tap water. She also made some other choices that have helped her regain her health.

But the main source of fluoride that she was ingesting in her system and impairing her thyroid gland from functioning was coming from her tap, she said. With so much fluoride in our natural environment and in a lot of the products that everybody uses, from air we breathe to breakfast cereal, she felt she was being overexposed.



Carole Clinch, a local mother, has cut Waterloo's tap water out of her diet after concerns about what it was doing to her health, and she said the health issues she's battled for 12 years have stared clearing up since then.



Robert Fleming, WaterlooWatch

New research on fluoridation:

And there was a growing body of research she found that suggests that overexposure to fluoride has wide ranging health impacts more than mottled teeth. As a true researcher she knew her anecdotal story wasn't enough to convince people of the concerns about overexposure to fluoride.

But the literature review she engaged in was much more damaging for those that have long argued that fluoridation of the water supply is a benefit not a health risk. That included the National Research Council report in 2006 that looked at more than 1,000 research projects concerning fluoridation, and a growing body of international research including in China where hydrofluorosilicic acid, which is used to fluoridate Waterloo's drinking water, is actually banned for human consumption.

She found that there was a rise in hypothyroidism in the general population in a lot of the research. Even more telling there was a similar rise in the condition in pets.

"Just think of how many litres you drink in a day," said Clinch. "The same applies to our pets."

While some of it can be blamed on air pollution delivering more than appropriate levels of fluoride, areas that fluoridate their water were also culprits.

While causality couldn't be proven, Clinch said most of the research at least suggests that fluoridation has no benefit. And if it has no benefit, she asked, why is Waterloo still using it?

"Do we ignore the science or do we learn from it?" said Clinch. "The precautionary principle is quite clear – if in doubt, leave it out."

She has since passed some of her research on to local municipal officials, as well as water officials in Hamilton who are further investigating some of her fluoridation research.

The City of Toronto has also considered a pilot project to stop fluoridation of drinking water at its Ashbridges Bay treatment plant last April after issues raised by some concerned citizens.

WaterlooWatch joins fight:

Clinch has been joined in her fight by Robert Fleming, a former member of WaterlooWatch who has reactivated that organization and its website at [www.waterloowatch.com](http://www.waterloowatch.com) to present some of the research that is out there. Fleming said he intended to keep a lower profile after his involvement as a citizen representative at the RIM Park inquiry, and most recently the battle over the west-side development of three new subdivisions on the Waterloo moraine.

But he became intrigued by some of the research that Clinch and others were showing him regarding fluoridation, and said it's time to shut off the "poison" being put into the water. He said he's not afraid to use that word because of the cumulative effect of fluoride in our bodies, as well as some of the byproducts like lead and arsenic that are also in the hydrofluorosilicic acid used to fluoridate Waterloo's water.

"Professionally, we already know what the right thing to do is," said Fleming. "If the majority of people knew all the existing science and facts around adding industrial fluoride into drinking water, this would be an issue.

"The problem is that people, especially those we thought would know - didn't know. Yet, the same people are denying what we are presenting to them, and they are not countering the factualness of what we are presenting.

"Nobody wants to hear the whole ugly story around this, so we are just going to talk about the science, facts and existing law concerning fluoridating drinking water with industrial toxic waste. We are just concerned messengers. That's what this is all about."

Angela Veith is one city councillor who has been in close contact with opponents of fluoridating Waterloo's drinking water. She's been convinced by the science that she's seen and disappointed that similar scientific findings haven't been received by the local health department. That's what's made her a driving force behind a report coming to council Monday night about the city's options concerning this matter.

Under the Fluoridation Act, the city could hold another referendum asking people whether they want fluoride in their water. That would have to come in time for the next municipal election in 2010. That would be the fourth referendum held on fluoridation in the city since the first plebiscite in 1966 that gave the municipality the go ahead to use it, and two referendums held in a two-year period from 1981 to 1982 after concerns were brought up by a group called the Waterloo Safe Water Society.

The second referendum in 1981 was decided by a percentage point, and there were concerns over the wording of the question. A second one was held during the municipal election campaign and included a much simpler question. More than 57 per cent of people who took part in that referendum voted in favour of retaining fluoridation.

Veith said council could put it to a vote by the public once again, but she thinks if the health concerns are true they have a mandate to

act now. "We have the responsibility to turn it off immediately," said Veith.

Bill Garibaldi, the city's director of water services, prepared the report for Monday night's council meeting suggesting what options are available under existing legislation. The report also includes a response from the Region of Waterloo's water department, which supplies the water and adds the hydrofluorosilicic acid to it, that addresses some of the health concerns raised by Clinch and others.

It concluded that the lead and arsenic aren't found at a level that would constitute a "drinking water health hazard" under the new Safe Drinking Water Act. The report states the risk is negligible, and, in contrast, the benefits are measurable at a "population level."

The Public Health Department also added its support to fluoridation as a way to fight tooth decay. It also stated that the balance of evidence continues to support it as a public health measure.

Garibaldi said it will ultimately be up to council to decide, as the water operators continue to work under safe parameters.

"There's a lot of things that don't make adding fluoride sinister," said Garibaldi. "Given that we've got a number of health officials providing information, from a staff point we intend to stay out of that particular arena.

"The quality of water is our area of operation, but the addition of fluoride is not and it just doesn't make sense for us to provide an opinion when there is much more learned opinion available."

Clinch, however, thinks the evidence for fluoridation isn't as readily available as the growing concern about it. Whatever the outcome this Monday it should at least spark a discussion about fluoridation and lead to a investigation of the facts for the people of Waterloo, she said.

She's willing to be a resource and has posted most of her findings on [www.waterloowatch.com](http://www.waterloowatch.com).

"I'm just asking to start the dialogue, nothing more than that," said Clinch. "I'm asking why, and the why question often doesn't get asked."

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