

Fixing Low Water Pressure

Troubleshoot Low Water Pressure Issues
and Learn When It's Time to Call a Plumber

FREE DIY GUIDE

This guide is provided as a free educational resource.
Always prioritize safety and consult a licensed professional for complex issues.

Disclaimer: This guide is for informational purposes only. The information provided does not constitute professional advice. Always follow local building codes and safety regulations.

Introduction

Low water pressure makes everyday tasks frustrating - showers feel weak, washing machines take forever to fill, and sprinklers barely reach the lawn. The causes range from simple fixes you can handle yourself to complex issues that require professional diagnosis. This guide helps you systematically troubleshoot the problem and determine the right course of action.

Understanding Water Pressure

Normal residential water pressure ranges from 40 to 60 PSI (pounds per square inch). Pressure below 40 PSI is considered low and will noticeably affect fixture performance. Pressure above 80 PSI is too high and can damage pipes and appliances.

How to Test Your Water Pressure

Buy a water pressure gauge (\$8-15 at any hardware store). Screw it onto an outdoor hose bib or laundry faucet. Turn the faucet on fully. The gauge will display your static water pressure in PSI. Test at different times of day, as pressure can fluctuate during peak usage hours.

Step 1: Determine the Scope

Before troubleshooting, figure out where the low pressure occurs:

Single Fixture

If only one faucet or showerhead has low pressure, the problem is localized to that fixture. This is usually the easiest to fix.

One Area of the House

If multiple fixtures in one area (e.g., one bathroom) have low pressure, the issue may be a partially closed valve or a problem with the branch line serving that area.

Entire House

If every fixture in the house has low pressure, the problem is with the main supply, the pressure regulator, or the main line itself.

Hot Water Only

If only hot water pressure is low, the problem is likely related to your water heater (sediment buildup, partially closed valve, or failing unit).

Step 2: Check the Obvious First

1. Main shutoff valve: Make sure it's fully open. It's usually near the water meter or where the main line enters your home. Turn it counterclockwise until it stops.
2. Water meter valve: This is the valve on the street side of your water meter. It should be fully open. If it was recently worked on by the utility company, it may not have been fully reopened.
3. Pressure regulator (if you have one): This bell-shaped device is usually near the main shutoff. If it's failing, it can restrict pressure. Testing and adjusting requires a pressure gauge.
4. Check for active leaks: A significant leak anywhere in your system will reduce pressure everywhere. Look for wet spots, running water sounds, or an unusually high water bill.

Step 3: Fix Low Pressure at a Single Fixture

Clean the Aerator (Faucets)

1. Unscrew the aerator from the tip of the faucet (turn counterclockwise). Use pliers with a cloth to avoid scratching.
2. Disassemble the aerator and note the order of the parts.
3. Soak all parts in white vinegar for 2-4 hours (or overnight for heavy buildup).
4. Scrub with an old toothbrush to remove remaining mineral deposits.
5. Rinse thoroughly, reassemble, and screw back onto the faucet.
6. Test the water flow.

Clean or Replace the Showerhead

1. Remove the showerhead by unscrewing it counterclockwise.
2. Soak in white vinegar for 4-8 hours.

3. Use a toothpick or needle to clear individual spray holes.
4. Rinse and reinstall with fresh pipe tape on the threads.
5. If cleaning doesn't help, replace the showerhead (\$15-40).

Check the Supply Valves

Each fixture has individual supply valves (usually under the sink or behind the toilet). Make sure they're fully open by turning counterclockwise until they stop.

Step 4: Fix Low Hot Water Pressure

If only your hot water pressure is low:

1. Check the shutoff valve on the cold water inlet to the water heater - make sure it's fully open.
2. Sediment buildup in the tank can restrict flow. Flush the water heater (see our [Water Heater Maintenance Guide](#)).
3. Check for kinks or restrictions in the hot water outlet pipe.
4. If you have a tankless water heater, it may need descaling.
5. Old water heaters with significant internal corrosion may restrict flow and need replacement.

Step 5: Address Whole-House Low Pressure

Check with Your Neighbors

If neighbors also have low pressure, the issue is with the municipal water supply. Contact your water utility to report the problem.

Inspect for Corroded Pipes

Homes with galvanized steel pipes (common in homes built before 1960) often experience low pressure due to internal corrosion and mineral buildup that narrows the pipe diameter over time. This is a progressive problem that gets worse and eventually requires repiping.

Check the Pressure Regulator

If your home has a pressure regulator (PRV) and it's failing, it may be restricting pressure. A plumber can test and replace it if needed. PRVs typically last 10-15 years.

Prevention Tips

- Clean faucet aerators and showerheads every 6 months
- Flush your water heater annually to prevent sediment buildup
- If you have hard water, consider a water softener to reduce mineral deposits throughout your plumbing
- Have your plumbing inspected annually, especially if your home is over 30 years old
- Replace old galvanized pipes with copper or PEX before they fail completely
- Install a whole-house water pressure gauge to monitor pressure over time

When to Call a Professional

While many minor plumbing issues can be handled as DIY projects, some situations require the expertise of a licensed plumber. Call a professional if you encounter any of the following:

- Your entire house has low pressure and the main valve is fully open
- You suspect corroded or galvanized pipes need replacing
- The pressure regulator needs testing, adjustment, or replacement
- You have a slab leak or underground leak reducing pressure
- Low pressure appeared suddenly (could indicate a broken pipe)
- Your water bill has increased significantly without explanation
- You need a booster pump installed to increase municipal supply pressure
- Multiple fixtures have low pressure despite cleaning aerators and checking valves
- You're experiencing water hammer or banging pipes along with low pressure

Why Hire a Licensed Plumber?

Licensed plumbers have the training, tools, and experience to diagnose problems accurately and make repairs that meet local building codes. Attempting complex repairs without proper knowledge can lead to water damage, health hazards, or code violations that cost far more to fix later.

A professional plumber can also provide preventive maintenance to help you avoid costly emergency repairs down the road. Regular inspections and maintenance are the best way to protect your home and your investment.