You probably eat me all the time, since you need me to live, though I’m always paired with my friend, Cl. When I’m alone, I look like a silvery metal, but you’d better watch out – I’m very reactive! I am known by two Latin names. The one on the periodic table refers to an ancient Egyptian medicine, while my more common name is a medieval headache cure.

Na – *natrium* (a.k.a. sodium)

I appear rather soft and dull, but I am very strong. I’ve been used to make many things like bullets, batteries and water pipes. In fact, the entire plumbing industry is named after me! But watch out – too much of me can lead to insanity – just ask the Romans.

Pb – *plumbum* (a.k.a. lead)

My name is Greek and means silver water, though I am neither elemental silver nor water. Alchemists believed I was magical, and many cultures thought I had medicinal properties, though that’s pretty far from the truth. But, I still managed to get a planet named after me!

Hg – *hydragyrum* (a.k.a. mercury)

If you eat lots of fruits and vegetables, you’re getting a healthy dose of me, which is good because your cells need me to function. In fact, I was first isolated from the ashes of plants (or “potash”) and it makes sense that I’m a big component of fertilizer. My name is a neo-Latin derivative of the name shared by my whole family – *alkali* metals.

K – *kalium* (a.k.a. potassium)

I am a very shiny, malleable metal. Although nowadays you probably associate me with wires, in ancient history I was a vital material for making all kinds of things like tools, jewelry and mirrors. If you blend me with other metals, you can make stronger things like buildings or sculptures, though they might turn green after a while. My name is Latin after Cyprus, the place where the Romans mined for me.

Cu – *cuprum* (a.k.a. copper)

I am the most common element on Earth. In fact, the Earth couldn’t exist without me, since I make up most of its inner structure. I was also critical to the advancement of humans, allowing them to make tools and weapons, and I’m a major component of steel. But don’t leave me out in the rain – I might rust.

Fe – *ferrum* (a.k.a. iron)