

## ***Facts About Salt***

**A Rich History** Salt has become an inexpensive and readily available commodity that most of us take for granted. But in older times salt was heavily taxed and wars were fought over it. In some ancient civilizations, salt was in such high demand that it was actually minted into coins to serve as the basic currency.

Where salt was scarce, it became as valuable as gold. As the Roman statesman Cassiodorus observed, "Some seek not gold, but there lives not a man who does not need salt." Salt was traded ounce-per-ounce with gold - if that were still the case we'd have to pay \$300-\$400 per ounce of salt!

Because everyone, rich and poor, craves salt, rulers going back at least as far as the Chinese emperor Yu in 2200 B.C. have tried mightily to control and tax it. Salt taxes helped finance empires throughout Europe and Asia, but also inspired a lively black market, smuggling rings, riots, and even revolutions.

**Chemically Speaking** Pure salt consists of the elements sodium and chlorine. Its chemical name is sodium chloride and its formula is NaCl. Its mineral name is halite.

Table salt is a chemically simple combination of two components, sodium and chlorine. The basic components of salt are, by themselves, potentially dangerous. Sodium will ignite immediately if it comes into contact with water, and chlorine is poisonous if ingested. In combination, though, the two elements form sodium chloride, commonly known as salt.

**The Human Side of Salt** In the body, salt is as important to humans as water or air, in fact each of us contain from four to eight ounces of salt. Salt helps maintain the normal volume of blood in the body and also helps keep the correct balance of water in and around the cells and tissues. It is also necessary for the formation and proper function of nerve fibers, which carry impulses to and from the brain, and plays an important part in the digestion of food and is essential in making the heart beat correctly.

The sodium found in salt is an essential nutrient. Sodium, together with calcium, magnesium and potassium, helps regulate the body's metabolism. In combination with potassium, it regulates the acid-alkaline balance in our blood and is also necessary for proper muscle functioning. When we don't get enough sodium chloride, we experience muscle cramps, dizziness, exhaustion and, in extreme cases, convulsions and death. Salt is essential to our well being.

For years, many researchers have claimed that salt threatens public health, mostly by contributing to high blood pressure. Recently, though, other researchers have begun to change salt's reputation. A recent review of salt studies conducted over the past two decades concluded that there's no reason for doctors to recommend reducing sodium intake for people with normal blood pressure. It may be that most of us are protected from excessive salt by our kidneys, which regulate the body's sodium level and eliminate any excess.

**Salt as a Healing Agent** Salt cures aren't new. In the early 19th Century, sick people traveled to rudimentary spas such as French Lick Springs in Indiana and Big Bone Lick, Kentucky, to soak in salt springs. Today's more luxurious spas offer salt baths, glows, rubs and polishes to exfoliate dead skin, stimulate circulation and relieve stress.

**The Source of Salt** All salts come from a sea, but not all salts come from the oceans we know today. The oceans that once covered the earth left a generous supply of salt beds and underground deposits which provide pure salt unpolluted by modern mankind. Crystalline salt deposits are found on every continent, from oceans that contained an estimated four-and-a-half million cubic miles of salt.

There are two basic methods for removing salt from the ground: room-and-pillar mining and solution mining. In room-and-pillar mining, shafts are sunk into the ground, and miners break up the rock salt with drills. The miners remove chunks of salt, creating huge rooms that are separated by pillars of salt. The room-and-pillar method requires that about half the salt be left behind as pillars. In solution mining, a well is drilled into the ground, and two pipes are lowered into the hole. The pipes consist of a small central pipe inside a larger pipe. The brine is either shipped as a liquid or evaporated in special devices called vacuum pans to form solid salt.

**Salt's Many Uses** Only about five percent of the world's annual salt production ends up as seasoning at the dinner table. The vast majority pours into chemical plants, where it leads the five major raw materials utilized by industry: salt, sulfur, limestone, coal and petroleum.

Salt pickles cucumbers, helps pack meat, can vegetables, cure leather, make glass, bread, butter, cheese, rubber and wood pulp. Salt has some 14,000 uses, more than any other mineral.

Salt is essential. In humans, it is a basic component of taste, along with sweet, sour and bitter.

**\*\*\* During the lifetime of the average American,  
he or she will use: \*\*\***

750 pounds of zinc 800 pounds of lead 1,500 pounds of copper 3,600 pounds of aluminum 26,000 pounds of clay 28,000 pounds of salt  
33,000 pounds of iron 365,000 pounds of coal 1,240,000 pounds of sand, gravel and cement

**In Your Kitchen** In cooking, salt acts as more than seasoning, pulling flavors together and accenting them. As a dry crystal, it preserves meat and fish by drawing out the moisture. It also acts as a meat tenderizer. It can be employed in a dough that is wrapped around meat or fish and turns into a flavor-sealing crust as it bakes.

Not all salt is the same. The ordinary table salt that most of us eat is too refined; it lacks the minerals we need. Also, yellow prussiate of soda and other additives and preservatives are added to prevent caking, dextrose is even added to improve flavor. About half of all table salt is supplemented with potassium iodide, which wards off goiter. RealSalt contains 50 natural occurring trace minerals like calcium, potassium, sulphur, magnesium, iron, phosphorus, manganese, copper, iodine and zinc.

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