



Natural Sea Salt... it does a body good!

Salt is the flavor enhancer. We need it, love it, crave it. It transforms our food. Natural sea salt is unrefined, hand-harvested, solar dried, pure. Table salt is processed, stripped of all trace minerals, leaving the subtle nuances of flavor behind. The cubed texture is uniform. Iodine and non-caking agents are added to prevent clumping which lend a bitter, acrid flavor. Natural sea salt has its trace minerals left intact giving a richer, more complex flavor than table salt and there are no additives. The texture of natural sea salt varies from region to region, harvester to harvester and is surprisingly different around the world. It can be a thin crisp flake, a coarse chunk, a tiny pearl. The color can be white or grey or pink. Some salt is completely dry; some is left moist. There are many styles to choose from which opens up a world of experimentation.

We have been eating salt for thousands of years. Actually, we've been eating it how it is found in nature for thousands of years: *unrefined*. It wasn't until modern times we started to refine it and adding iodine to it. Note: If you live in a hot climate, eating salt as part of your regular diet is even more important because significant amounts of sodium are lost in sweating.

A few things to know about unrefined salt:

Natural salt is generally a very healthful product. Unrefined sea salt is an important source of minerals. This is especially today, as the food supply is mineral-deficient due to hybrid crops, modern agriculture methods and food processing and refining.

Unrefined salt has little or no effect on blood pressure. It helps maintain electrolyte and osmotic (the force needed to dissolve other minerals) balance. It also has an alkalizing

effect on the body and rightly so, because mineral content is where you achieve alkalinity, not through your drinking water.

The sodium it contains is critical for osmotic balance and to solubilize (dissolve fatty tissues) other minerals in the blood. Deficiency of sodium causes other minerals to become unusable and deposit into the soft tissues and other types of tissues throughout the body.

These are terrific reasons to eat salt on food. Avoiding a quality unrefined sea salt is rarely necessary and often harmful since it is a source of vital minerals. I recommend quality sea salt in moderate amounts for almost everyone. Those with very high blood pressure may need to wait until their pressure drops, although a quality sea salt may actually assist in diminishing their high blood pressure.



So what's happened to our salt supply? It's been refined by food companies, and therefore regulated by government. Partly due to the practice of refining table salt, the government forces salt companies to enrich all table salt with iodine. This is a positive benefit of table salt, but the only benefit.



Common table salt is a highly refined product and one of the worst junk foods. Virtually all its trace minerals are missing, so that it is almost pure sodium chloride. The trace minerals are removed and sold separately. This profits the salt company and leaves our bodies impoverished.

Its unbalanced mineral content actually causes more mineral imbalances, as it is too high in sodium and very low in calcium and magnesium, two vital minerals today that can be obtained to a degree from unrefined salt.

If mineral depletion is not bad enough, common table salt often has aluminum, a toxic metal, added as a flowing agent. It is also often bleached for whiteness with other toxic chemicals. It is an unbalanced, toxic product that should be totally avoided.

Natural Unrefined Sea Salt contains 74 to 94 trace elements and minerals that the human body needs to be healthy. Processed Table Salt contains 1 to 4 minerals. And it's 98% Sodium Chloride.

Industry heats and boils off all the minerals leaving virtually pure Sodium. They then repackage the elements and minerals as Vitamins and Minerals and resell them to the public to cure the damage caused by the pure sodium.



Are all salts created equal?

Trace minerals in sea salt contribute subtle differences in taste, which is one reason you probably have a favorite brand of bottled spring water. Some sea salt is briny and powerful (Japanese Nazuna, South African Sea Salt Flakes), others milder, yet rich and clean (Cornish Sea Salt, Kona Deep Water Sea Salt). Some are rich, moist, and sweet (Fleur de Sel), while others are dry with a distinct sweetness (Pink Salts).

Color differences are due to mineral content and algae (that doesn't sound very appealing, but it is true). Sea salt that is white is harvested from the surface of concentrated brine. Grey Sea Salt is harvested from the bottom of salt ponds and have a higher mineral and clay content which accounts for their color. Murray River Pink Salt Flakes gains its hue from carotene produced by algae in the brine, and mined salts are pink from their mineral and iron content. Red and black salts do not occur in nature. Rather, they are man-made blends using clay or activated charcoal (Hawaiian Red Alaea Sea Salt, Black Lava Sea Salt, or Black Cyprus Sea Salt Flakes). Color adds subtle flavor differences in salt, but it is the visual appeal that makes the colors so intriguing. Try a tomato-mozzarella salad sprinkled with a black sea salt or a white sea salt on a chocolate sauce.

Of all the characteristics of sea salt, it is the salt's crystallization that has the most dramatic effect. Each salt has its own unique crystal makeup, and, as a result, brings its own special qualities to food.

Texture is critical to all good cooking. It is why one sauce served over pappardelle is a decidedly different dish than the same sauce served over macaroni. It's why a baked potato topped with butter and sour cream tastes differently than mashed potatoes made with the very same ingredients. And it's why a plate of eggs finished with a shaving of black truffle is heavenly, and a plate of eggs finished with a dice of black truffle far less appealing.

The textural differences of salt harvested in different parts of the world is just like that of a snowflake. Snow in New England is completely different (some would say awful) than snow in Colorado. We New Englanders love our corner of the States, but if you are a skier, western snow is superior because its flake is drier, lighter, and fluffier. The formation of salt crystals is equally dramatic; as is the effect those salt crystals have on food. Imagine you've prepared a Caesar salad. Half the salad you toss in a bowl with finely-grated Parmigiano Reggiano; the other half you toss in a separate bowl with large shavings of Parmigiano Reggiano. The two salads will be decidedly different, in spite of the fact that the cheese in both came from the same wedge. Salt will always be sodium chloride, no differently than Parmigiano will always be Parmigiano, but it's the discerning cook who takes into consideration the importance of texture.

Using Natural Salt

Most natural salts are used as finishing salts, scattered on your dish before serving. That enables you to experience the unique texture and flavor of the salt, the sheer beauty of the different crystals, their color, and each salt's unique and particular effect on food. Another exceptional benefit to using natural sea salt as a finishing salt is you will consume far less than table salt because of the incredible depth of flavor. Additionally, you will be able to control the amount you use. If you cook with fresh ingredients and season with natural sea salt, you will be in charge of your sodium intake.



To Grind or not to Grind... that is the question

Grinding sea salt is a perfect way to enjoy sea salts that have very hard crystals or are too large to serve on their own. Use a grinder with a ceramic or plastic grinding mechanism as sea salt will corrode a grinder with metal blades (even ones with stainless steel grinders, over time). Coarse sea salt with moisture needs a grinder with a

ceramic or plastic blade. Ceramic grinders work better than plastic as they are firmer and last longer.

Baking with Sea Salt

Baking can be very exacting. Salt measurements in cookbooks and other recipes are geared for *fine grain table salt*, not hand-harvested sea salt (unless otherwise noted). Because of the coarseness of most sea salt, the grains take up much more volume in the measuring utensil and will throw off the amount of salt specified. In addition, the crystals of medium-coarse textured sea salt will not dissolve during cooking.

Using a finishing salt on baked goods or desserts is another story! There is something beguiling and pleasing about crunching into a grain of fleur de sel on a sugar cookie, or a scattering of Guava Smoked Sea Salt over chocolate ice cream. Scatter sea salt over focaccia before baking, or serve with caramel sauces. The sweet-salt union is growing in popularity and is an area that is waiting for your creativity.



Himalayan Pink Salt Tiles, Bricks, and Plates

Salt tiles, bricks, and plates have become increasingly popular in the last few years. They make beautiful serving dishes and cooking vessels and offer a dramatic presentation. They season the food being cooked or served and may be used over and over again. Use them chilled for sushi, salad, ice cream, sorbet, fresh cheeses, and fruit. Heat them and cook shrimp, scallops, thin slices of fish, beef steak, pork tenderloin, vegetables, mushrooms, or use to fry eggs.

Heating the salt tiles, bricks, and plates will change their color and surface irregularities will appear. They may take on a darker color depending on what type of food has been cooked. Your salt block will last for a very long time. However, after a long time, it will become too thin for cooking. At that point, break up the tile, brick, or plate into small pieces and use as a finishing salt over food by grating with a microplane grater. There is no waste with tiles, bricks, and plates!

Salt block sizes are easy to clean. A simple wash in warm water with a gentle scrub removes the food. The salt is naturally antimicrobial and does not need detergents for cleaning. Pat excess water with a towel and rest on the towel until completely dry. Store your salt block in a zip bag, especially in the summer or if you live in a humid climate. The salt may weep and drip. It is not necessary to seal the bag, but to keep the salt from direct contact with your counter.



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