



# Health-sustaining sea salt

Graham Butler, CNPA

The oceans of the world are our greatest and most diverse biological system, characterized by a life-sustaining nutrient-rich solution that we call seawater—a mixture of roughly 96.5 per cent water (H<sub>2</sub>O) and 3.5 per cent mineral salts.

In recent years, sea salt has been popularized as an alternative to table salt for those suffering from high blood pressure. Indeed, the complex mineral salts found in sea salt are a natural source of trace minerals and electrolytes essential to our health. These are nutrients that are often absent or stripped away from our foods because of chemical farming practices and food-processing techniques. Substituting unrefined sea salt for table salt may alleviate these deficiencies.

## Composition

Common table salt is usually refined rock salt with a minimum sodium

chloride (NaCl) content of 99.5 per cent. Unrefined sea salt has a natural NaCl content of approximately 98 per cent, with the remainder being chlorides and bromides comprising some 80 major and trace minerals, including minute quantities of naturally occurring iodine sufficient to meet our dietary needs. Although sea salt contains slightly less sodium than table salt, the major difference is the complex nature of the salt itself and its value as a source of trace minerals.

## Why use salt at all?

Many people believe that salt is not a necessary part of the diet because it

may contribute to high blood pressure and water retention. It is a commonly held thought that we get all the salt we need from the food we eat. Salt, though, is an essential electrolyte that can be depleted easily under certain circumstances such as heat waves, for example. Salt loss during intense physical activity can lead to serious injury or even death. The recent death of a Boston Marathon competitor as a result of hyponatremic encephalopathy, a swelling of the brain due to sodium depletion, has underscored the importance of this nutrient for everyone involved in sports.



In addition to its use as a nutrient and seasoning, sea salt is also used as a mild abrasive in cosmetic applications and as a bath salt, sometimes in combination with Epsom salts. Dead Sea salts, however, are not interchangeable with sea salt nor are they used for culinary purposes. They are better suited as bath salts for muscular aches and skin problems.

### Buying sea salt

Unfortunately, most people still purchase the wrong type of sea salt—refined sea salt. It differs little from conventional table salt in its composition, taste, or appearance. In contrast, unrefined sea salt is usually grey or pale yellow and is available in coarse or fine varieties. Granules of sea salt are much finer than table salt and tend to clog saltshakers unless the holes are enlarged. Sea salt

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also dissolves about four times faster and, as a result, tastes saltier than table salt. Coarse sea salt is great for cooking.

If used at the table, purchase an adjustable salt grinder or one specifically designed for sea salt. Unrefined sea salt is available in prepackaged shakers, 500-gram and one-kilogram bags, and as a bulk item in some stores. Health food stores and online suppliers are the most reliable sources, but the prices are far lower in stores.

It's time to give sea salt a try. The flavour of unrefined sea salt is very similar to table salt and the average palate won't discern their subtle differences. **F**

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