

[IMAGE]

The Good Side of Salt

By Ben Benjamin, PhD and Lois Orth-Zitoli

Water does not work on its own. It needs help from both salt and protein. Salt and protein are like guardians; they move water to where it should be and keep it there. Without sodium (salt) in the body, the water you drink would never be absorbed and drinking a glass of water would cause diarrhea. Basically, salt pulls water through the intestinal lining and into circulation.

Once water is circulating, proteins attract water in almost the same way that iron filings are attracted to a magnet. The attraction of water for the proteins in the blood maintains the blood volume and circulation. If there were no proteins in the blood, the water would flow right through the walls of arteries and veins and into the surrounding tissue. The blood volume would drop and cells and tissues would not receive necessary nutrients and oxygen and the cells would die. Insufficient salt and protein results in low blood volume and, therefore, very poor blood circulation. The most common symptoms of this are cold hands and feet, low blood pressure and dizziness when standing quickly from lying down or sitting.

Besides helping to control fluid volume in the body, sodium is also required for the absorption of many minerals and amino acids (proteins). Many people know that too much salt can be "bad for you." Individuals who eat a lot of processed foods have high salt diets that can be detrimental. One reason is that excessive salt intake causes increased excretion of calcium in the urine. Of course, processed foods do not contain adequate calcium or other quality nutrients so eating refined foods actually causes depletion of nutrients. However, if you are on a whole-foods diet and do not eat a lot of refined or processed foods, you might need to add some salt to your food. Many health-conscious individuals are actually salt deficient. Recent research has even found a link between salt deficiency and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The quality of available salt is very variable. Salt in its natural form is 82 percent sodium and chloride and 18 percent other minerals. Most salt sold in the grocery store is processed and therefore is almost 100% percent sodium and chloride. The purpose of adding iodine to processed salt is to prevent iodine deficiencies. Adding iodine to sodium chloride crystals causes them to turn purple. Since purple salt is not "acceptable," the salt is bleached to turn it white again. Flow agent chemicals are added to reduce the absorption of moisture from the air and keep the salt flowing from your salt shaker.

Most table salt is no longer in its natural form, it has had all the minerals except sodium and chloride removed and it contains residues of the bleaching chemicals along with the flow agents. Sea salt, frequently sold in health food stores, may also have had all the minerals except sodium and chloride removed. If a salt is very white and dry, it has had the additional minerals removed. Salt in its natural form is usually greyish, off-white, or even pink, and is moist.

Authors' note: This article was adapted from an article by Joy Bicknell and Ben Benjamin.

Ben Benjamin, PhD, holds a doctorate in education and sports medicine, and was founder of the Muscular Therapy Institute. Dr. Benjamin has been in private practice for more than 45 years.

Lois Orth-Zitoli, LMT, maintains a private practice in massage therapy and health/nutrition coaching in Chicago. She is a graduate of the Institute for Integrative Nutrition in New York City. Lois leads workshops on nutrition, coaches both individuals and groups, and teaches healthy cooking classes.

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