

All Salts Are Not Created Equal But Have the Same Effect on Heart

By Janet Hackert, Nutrition Specialist

All salts – table salt, rock salt, and sea salt – are not created equally, but have basically the same effect when it comes to heart health. And yet according to an American Heart Association survey, “Sixty-one percent of respondents incorrectly agreed that sea salt is a low-sodium alternative to table salt.”

Table salt and rock salt versus sea salt are all mostly sodium chloride and in fact have approximately the same amount of sodium chloride by weight. But they come from different sources. Table salt and rock salt are mined from underground deposits and are refined to remove trace elements. Table salt is finer and often has an additive to prevent clumping. It also usually has iodine added to help with normal thyroid function.

Rock salt is the less refined product of mining the deposits. It is courser and does not usually have any additives. Its larger crystals are useful in curing meats by drawing moisture from the meat.

As its name implies, sea salt comes from evaporating the water from sea water. The salt that remains contains tiny amounts of minerals, such as magnesium, iron, sulfur, calcium and/or potassium, that were present in the sea water. These trace minerals give sea salts their unique flavors and colors.

So although they differ some in flavor, texture, and processing, sea salt, rock salt, and table salt are all *sodium* chloride. And, “High-sodium diets are linked to an increase in blood pressure and a higher risk for heart disease and stroke,” according to Dr. Gerald Fletcher, M.D., American Heart Association spokesperson and professor of medicine - cardiovascular diseases, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville, Fla.

The *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends adults consume no more than 1500 mg/d, or just about one half teaspoon. So regardless of what kind of salt is chosen, watch for salt in processed foods and used at the table to keep levels at or below 1500 mg/d for a healthy heart.

(Written August 8, 2011)