Why You Should Consume Himalayan Pink Salt

Pink Himalayan salt has received a lot of publicity over the last two decades as a healthier, natural alternative to ordinary table salt for use in cooking.

As the name suggests, Pink Himalayan salt is light pink in color, comes from the Himalayan mountain range and contains more than 80 trace minerals[1].

Health fanatics have consistently raved about it, stating that "it has many more health benefits than ordinary salt owing to its incredible mineral content." Some even feel that they can use pink Himalayan salt as an amazing mineral supplement to help treat medical conditions; with a much less risk of having the high blood pressure associated with a large sodium intake – yet neither of these claims are true.

While there are a few benefits that come with using pink salt, the majority of the claims made about it don't have any substance to them when one looks a little closer. This article is here to clarify the difference between table salt and Himalayan pink salt, as well as whether pink salt truly has any health benefits or not.

How Pink Himalayan Salt Differs

from Ordinary Table Salt

In spite of its diverse mineral content and pretty coloring, there is little difference between pink Himalayan salt and regular table salt, and both can be used for the same culinary purposes.

Here are the main ways in which pink salt differs to table salt:

Color

The first difference between the two is the color. Pink Himalayan salt is not white like ordinary table salt, but rather emits a pale pink color thanks to trace amounts of iron oxide (which makes up ±0.004% of it’s composition). When ordinary table salt is mined or extracted from nature, it is usually a slight off-white color depending on minerals found in it. After processing, table salt turns a pristine white color.

Origin

All salt originates from the ocean, whether by direct evaporation of sea water or the dried up residues of seawater where ancient seas and lakes used to be. The majority of table salt is harvested from sites all over the world, either from mines as rock salt or through the mechanical evaporation of brine. Pink Himalayan salt is only mined from the Khewra Salt mine in Pakistan, which is one of the largest salt mines on the planet.

Mineral Content

Although pink Himalayan salt contains more than 80 trace minerals, the content of minerals does not differ that much from ordinary table salt in that both salts roughly comprise of the same amount of sodium chloride!

Himalayan pink salt does have *slightly* less sodium chloride, comprising of 97.41% as opposed to the 98% in table salt. The remaining 2.59% portion of Himalayan pink salt is the part that contains the 80+ trace minerals, most of which are in amounts of less than 4 parts per million (less than 0.000004%).

Ordinary table salt does not contain any of these other minerals and it's 2% non-sodium chloride portion consists of food additives, such as anti-caking agents and iodine. In its natural state, both calcium and magnesium can be found in ordinary sea salt, however these minerals are considered as impurities and removed during processing.

Flavor

Due to the fact that pink salt contains the original mineral set that it was mined with, it has a slightly different flavor profile to normal table salt. Some chefs will vouch for pink Himalayan salt, claiming that it improves the flavor of their meals instead of normal salt. For many people, the difference is hardly noticeable, with the exception that pink Himalayan salt tastes even saltier than traditional table salt.

Processing

All salt undergoes processing to ensure it is free from impurities, such as toxins and pollution. Most salts in their natural form contain small fractions of trace minerals, as well as halites (which are toxic for us in large quantities). If the salt is extracted directly from sea water, it may also contain microscopic amounts of algae.

Ordinary table salt is typically collected from brine or salt mines, after which it is broken down and recrystallized in a solution that contains heavy chemicals. These chemicals react with the impurities in the salt and after a few evaporations, pure crystals of sodium chloride are created which are then

kiln-dried[2]. Additionally, culinary table salt is modified with anti-caking agents to prevent clumping, as well as fortified nutrients such as potassium iodide.

Himalayan pink salt, on the other hand, does not nearly go through as much extensive processing as table salt does. The Pakistan government evaluates the safety of all salts before they leave the mine and out of all the salts mined from the Khewra Salt Mine, pink salt has the lowest amount of 'impurities[3].' The impurities referred to are only natural trace minerals (apart from sodium and chloride), accounting for 2.59% of the salts structure. As a result, Himalayan pink salt is merely rinsed, dried and crushed into smaller particles for easy use and consumption.

Is Pink Himalayan Salt a Healthier Option? Benefits and Side Effects

As it happens, when you weigh the pros and cons between pink salt and table salt, Himalayan pink salt turns out to be the healthier option; *but **not** because of the minerals it contains.*

The various health claims that are attributed to the mineral content of Himalayan pink salt – such as "it helps regulate blood sugar levels" or "eases pain associated with arthritis" – are flawed from the beginning, because the quantities of each trace mineral are too low to make a difference. Only 2.59% of pink salt accounts for these 80+ trace minerals, while the rest of the salt is sodium chloride.

To give an example, some of the highest contents of trace minerals in the 2.59% portion are calcium and potassium, at 4.05mg/g and 3.5mg/g respectively. Let's say you were to consume your maximum daily dose of Himalayan pink salt (5mg), you would be ingesting about 20.25mg of calcium and 17.5mg of

potassium. Considering you need at least 1000mg of calcium[4]and 3500mg of potassium[5]every day for optimal health, these amounts are hardly going to add to your intake, let alone solve a mineral deficiency!

Using Himalayan pink salt as a magical mineral supplement will not work and in fact, will likely cause an imbalance of sodium in the body, just like overdosing on ordinary salt would.

Instead, let’s look at what really does make pink Himalayan salt better for us over normal table salt, as well as realistic drawbacks we should consider before using it.

Benefits

The benefits of Himalayan pink salt revolve around the fact that it is hardly processed without any additives and according to some, has a better flavor!

1. **Less Processing**

The chemical processing that table salt goes through includes the use of industrial bleach as a whitening agent, as well as other harsh chemicals to get rid of impurities. When you consume normal salt, you are ingesting small amounts of concentrated bleach and other chemicals, which may induce irritation in your mouth, throat and intestinal tract as well as attack the lining of your stomach[6].

Pink Himalayan salt does not contain any chemicals and is only cleaned using water.

2. **No Additives**

Himalayan pink salt does not contain any food additives, whereas ordinary table salt does. While all food additives have been approved as safe amongst governing bodies, not all of them have been tested for long term effects on health. There is a handful of research that suggests that some common

additives used in table salt may produce negative side effects in the long run.

One example is Ferrocyanide, which is an iron-bound form of cyanide that is commonly used as an anti-caking agent in salt.

Although it has a low toxicity and does not accumulate in any bodily tissues, there is research done on rats to suggest that it can cause kidney damage in large quantities[7]. Much older research demonstrated that animals reabsorb 40% of this substance through the kidneys, which suggests that it may keep circulating the body, causing potential long-term damage[8]. The latest safety reports indicate that only 5.6% of the tiny percentage in salt is absorbed, however it is still best to be cautious, particularly if you have kidney problems.

3. **Saltier Flavor**

Himalayan pink salts mineral content contributes to it having a 'saltier' flavor. This is a benefit in that less pink salt is required to bring the flavor out of your food!

Side Effects

Himalayan pink salt side effects are ultimately exactly the same as that for ordinary table salt, with the exception that it lacks iodine, whereas ordinary table salt is fortified with it.

1. **Risk of Consuming Too Much Sodium and Chloride**

Just like with any kind of salt, including ordinary salt, Himalayan pink salt will contribute to an imbalance of both sodium and chloride if one exceeds the recommended daily intake of salt (5000mg).

Ingesting too much sodium will interfere with your body's natural electrolyte balance, contributing to many healthy problems.

Negative effects of ingesting too much sodium include[9]:

- Contributing to heart disease and hypertension
- High blood pressure
- Increased risk of heart attacks and strokes
- Possibly bad for bone health
- Pressure on the kidneys
- Stiffened arteries in the long run

Ingesting too much chloride also comes with problems, such as contributing to high levels of bodily acidity[10]. This may cause gastric reflux or heartburn, as well as irritate the lining of the gut[11]. Heightened levels of bodily acidity also may contribute to kidney problems and bone mineral density loss[12].

These are just a few reasons why it is important to reduce your salt intake, regardless of whether you are using table salt or Himalayan pink salt.

2. **Too Little Iodine**

The only side effect unique to Himalayan pink salt is its unreliable iodine content. It contains an amount anywhere beneath 100mcg per gram. This means that in your daily serving of pink salt, you would be ingesting 500 or less micrograms, which is inconsistent and thus unreliable. Table salt contains 0.01% of potassium iodide on average. A daily serving of ordinary table salt will amount to about 500-600mcg, making it a reliable source of iodine that can prevent iodine deficiency.

The majority of people get their iodine from iodized table salt and those who switch over to non-iodized salt need to make an effort to include more iodine in their diets to prevent a deficiency. An iodine deficiency causes the thyroid to become unbalanced and can negatively interfere with many bodily functions. Seafood, dairy products and eggs are good dietary sources of iodine. Potassium Iodide supplements are

also available as an option.

Final Thoughts

At the end of the day, pink Himalayan salt only has very few benefits over and above that of regular table salt. Although it has a diversity of ±84 trace minerals, the quantities of each are far too low to expect any major health benefits.

Pink salt benefits lie in the fact that this salt does not undergo extensive processing, which may minimize possible long-term damage due to the additives and whitening agents (like bleach) in table salt. Many people prefer the flavor of pink salt and its extra salty profile may help some to cut down on their sodium intake.

For the above reasons, pink Himalayan salt is the healthier option and should not be used as a mineral supplement, but rather as a more natural salt alternative. If you're going to switch over to pink salt, make sure you are getting adequate amounts of iodine in your diet, either in the form of seafood or an iodine supplement.

Resources

[1] https://bit.ly/2D8E40S

[2] https://web.archive.org/web/20090409144219/http://www.saltsense.co.uk/aboutsalt-prod02.htm

[3] https://www.jcsp.org.pk/ArticleUpload/1249-5588-1-RV.pdf

[4] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK56068/table/summarytables.t3/?report=objectonly

[5] https://bit.ly/2zzbp1C

[6] https://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/search/a?dbs+hsdb:@term+@DOCNO+748

[7] https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/animal-feed_additives_rules_scan-old_report_out70.pdf

[8] https://dm5migu4zj3pb.cloudfront.net/manuscripts/100000/100798/JCI36100798.pdf

[9] https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/salt-and-sodium/sodium-health-risks-and-disease/

[10] https://worldwidescience.org/topicpages/h/hyperchloremic+metabolic+acidosis.html

[11] https://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/search/a?dbs+hsdb%3A%40term+%40DOCNO+6368

[12] https://dm5migu4zj3pb.cloudfront.net/manuscripts/105000/105467/JCI66105467.pdf