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| http://42explore.com/salt.gif | **The Topic:** ***Salt*** |



**Easier** - Salt is a common colorless or white substance that is found both in sea water and in deposits in the earth. Animals including humans need salt in their diets. Salt is used to season and preserve food. It is also used in making soap and glass.

Salt is an essential part of the human metabolism. The body needs salt to replace that lost through evaporation (sweat) and excretion (in urine) People whose diet is animal based (meat and milk) can survive without additional salt intake. Those who are vegetarians cannot, and must supplement their diet with added salt.

**Harder** - Salt is a clear, brittle mineral that contains the elements of sodium and chlorine. Its chemical formula is NaCl; its mineral name is halite. Salt forms clear, cube-shaped crystals. Impurities can cause salt to appear white, gray, yellow, or red. Table salt also appears to be white.

All salt deposits began as salty water; brine from seas, oceans, and salt lakes. Even underground salt deposits were formed by the evaporation of sea water, eons ago. In ancient times, salt was found mainly in the dry coastal areas like those surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

Since ancient times, salt has been used to flavor and preserve food. Early trade routes and many of the first roads were established for transporting salt. Many ancient civilizations levied taxes on salt. Salt was considered so precious that it was traded ounce for ounce for gold. In ancient China, coins were made of salt. In the Mediterranean regions, salt cakes were used as money. Ancient cities such as Genoa, Pisa, and Venice became salt market centers. By the fifteenth century, salt was obtained by boiling brine from salt springs, and many towns and cities in Europe located near such sources. During the eighteenth century, the efficiency of the boiling brine process was improved by using coal instead of wood as fuel. Because of its coal supply, England became the leading salt producer in the world. Early colonies in America were dependent on England for most of their salt. After the Revolutionary war, the United States developed saltworks along the Atlantic coast for boiling sea water. After salt springs were discovered in New York, near where the city of Syracuse is today, the Erie Canal was constructed. By the early nineteenth century, equipment and technology was developed for the deep-drilling of wells, a process that improved the quality and increased the quantity of salt springs used for salt production. In the mid-1800s, underground mining of salt deposits began.