

LEVELED BOOK • 0

Salt Rocks!

Written by Joan Linck • Illustrated by Len Epstein

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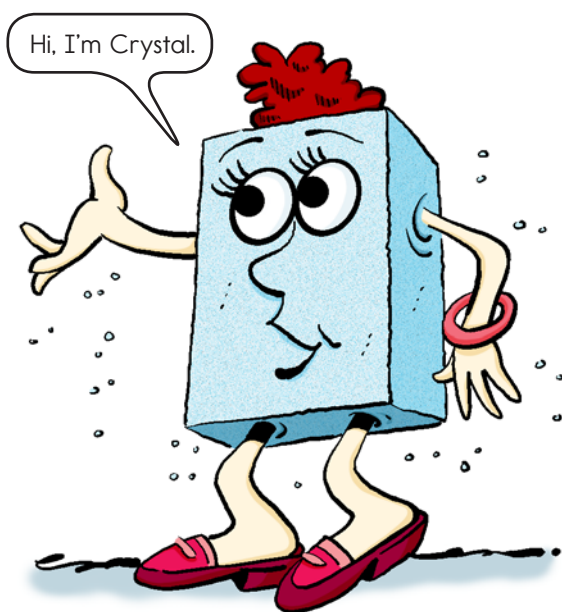
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Take It with a Grain of Salt

If your friends told you to eat rocks, would you? Perhaps you would take what they say *with a grain of salt*. This means that you should not trust that everything you hear is true.

When you eat salt, you actually are eating a rock. Well, it's a **mineral**, to be more exact. It comes in little **crystals**. Hey, my name is Crystal, too!



It may surprise you to learn just how important this little white mineral can be. Well, you're about to read a whole book on it.

First of all, there is salt in your body right now. In fact, without salt you would die!

People and animals need salt to live.

Your body uses salt to make your muscles move and to help your blood flow. Salt also



helps you make good use of the food you eat and controls the water inside you. It even keeps your heart beating. If you have too little salt in you, you may feel tired or dizzy.

But putting too much salt inside you can make you sick. Over many years, too much salt can make your heart and other parts of your body weak.



Do You Know?

The average American eats 15 lbs (6.8 kg) of salt per year —the weight of a heavy bowling ball.

Many foods already have a lot of salt in them. But sometimes people add more salt for **seasoning**. Salt is not known as a spice because it does not come from a plant. But salt and spices both add flavor to food.

Sodium is another word for salt. One little spoonful of salt has as much sodium as your body needs for a whole day. The label on a food or drink package tells you how much sodium it has. If there is a lot of salt, there will be a lot of sodium. A lot of people try to eat foods low in sodium. They know that too much of it can be harmful. You may have seen foods marked *low in sodium*.

Don't Rub Salt in the Wound

Salt can do much more than make food taste better. A common use is to keep food from spoiling. Long ago, there were no refrigerators or cans to keep food fresh. So people put salt on meat and soaked vegetables in salt water. It helped them **preserve** the food so they could eat it later.



beef
jerky

But be aware! Salt is not a magic tool.

Once a food spoils, salt will not make it safe to eat again.



pickle



Salt Sayings

Suppose you fell off your bike and scraped your knee. It would feel even worse if you put salt on the wound. Ouch! So what does the saying "don't rub salt in the wound" mean? If someone feels bad already, do not do something to make it worse.

Would you put salt in your milk?
Probably not. People once tried to keep milk from going bad by adding salt to it. Yuck! This did not work very well. Fortunately, we have discovered many other uses for salt.

Which of these are other ways people have used salt?

- treat illness
- put out fires
- clean fish tanks
- kill weeds
- treat bites and stings
- make glass
- wash clothes
- treat poison ivy
- clean chimneys
- make leather

Answer: all of them!



Mummies and Fast Cars!

About 3,000 years ago in Egypt, people hoped to live on after death. So when someone died, workers dried out the body by rubbing it with salt. Then they wrapped up the body and buried it. This preserved the body. People believed this would let their loved one rest in peace forever. We call these wrapped-up bodies **mummies**.

Another amazing use of salt involves super-fast cars. Some deserts have very large, flat areas called salt flats. The ground was once the bottom of a salty sea. The land is very smooth because salt grains cover the ground. The salt also keeps plants from growing there. A jet car once went 763 miles (1,228 km) per hour on a salt flat in Nevada. That is faster than many airplanes!





Salt of the Earth

Salt is a natural material called *sodium chloride*. It is found all over the world and comes in little, clear crystals called **grains**. In nature, large groups of salt grains stick together and form rocks. Rocks of salt are often white, like the salt you eat. But I bet you didn't know that salt rocks can also be brown, orange, or even pink!

Salt Sayings

The saying "salt of the earth" describes people who are the best of their kind. It means a person you can rely on. Comparing someone to salt is a compliment. It proves how important salt is to people.

Back to the Salt Mines

Salt is found all over the world. It can be found in the sea and on the land. But it is hard to get the salt from these places.

Much of the salt in the world is **dissolved** in ocean water. To get the salt out, people in the past heated large pots of salt water over fires. Others filled ponds with ocean water. The heat from the fire or the Sun made the water **evaporate**. The salt crystals stayed behind.

Try This!

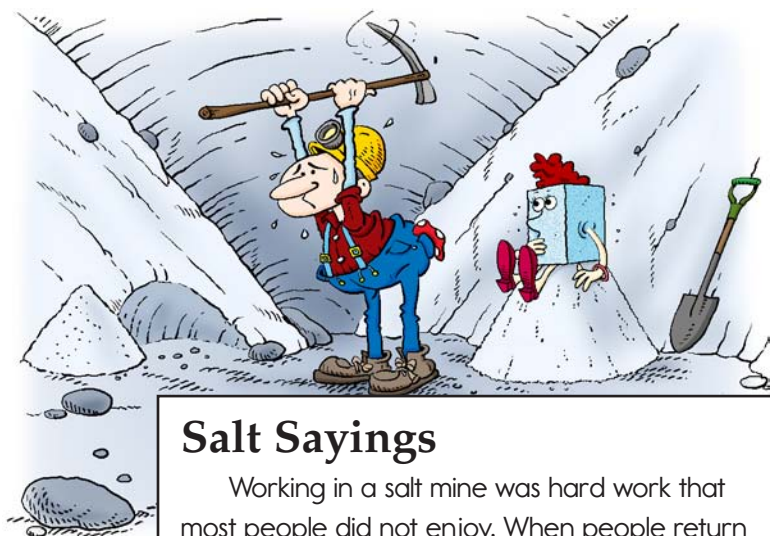
Mix some salt into warm water and stir it. Pour a little salt water into a small, clear dish. Set it in a sunny spot for a day or more until all the water is gone. Use a hand lens to look at what is left behind.



Sea salt harvest in France

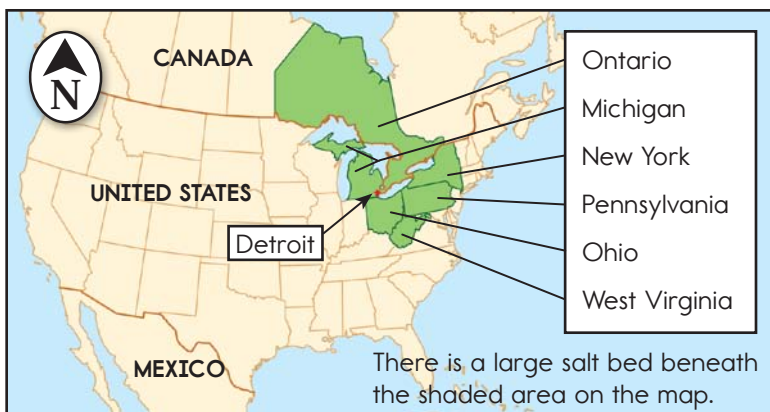
People do not only get salt from the oceans. There are a few places in the world where rocks of white salt lay right on the ground. You could pick one up, crush it, and sprinkle it right onto a bowl of popcorn. But these places are rare.

Most salt on land is buried deep underground. When people found salt buried underground, they dug it out and used it. If there was a lot of salt and it was deep, workers would dig a **mine**.



Salt Sayings

Working in a salt mine was hard work that most people did not enjoy. When people return to work today, even at a job they like, they may say that they are going “back to the salt mines.”



People living in Germany hundreds of years ago built a salt mine inside their mountains. Men broke off large rocks of salt with strong tools. They used animals to haul it out to the villages. Giant wooden slides brought workers down into the mine and helped pull out the heavy salt rocks.

Today, there is a huge salt bed beneath part of the United States and Canada. One of the biggest salt mines in the world is under the city of Detroit, Michigan. There are about fifty miles of underground roads made of salt! The salt mine is as deep as the height of a tall building.

Are You Worth Your Salt?

Salt was hard to get in most places 2,000 years ago. It was very expensive and had to be kept locked up. Salt was so special that some people were paid with salt instead of money!

Today, salt is very cheap and easy to find. Many places give it away for free. You see it on the table at most restaurants.

Salt Sayings

Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. If a soldier didn't do a good job, people might say that he wasn't "worth his salt." In fact, the word *salary* comes from the name for the salt payments—*salarium*. How would you like to be paid in salt?





A salt truck spreading salt on an icy road

Much of the salt used today is not used with food. Salt makes it harder for water to freeze. So we put over half the salt that comes from mines onto icy roads and sidewalks. This helps keep cars from crashing and people from slipping. Imagine a visitor from 2,000 years ago seeing a huge truck just dumping precious salt on a road!

Be happy you live in a time when salt is easy to find. Your body needs salt to live—that's *crystal* clear. You do not have to take that fact with a grain of salt.

Glossary

crystals (<i>n.</i>)	minerals formed in regular, tight patterns (p. 4)
dissolved (<i>adj.</i>)	completely mixed into a liquid (p. 11)
evaporate (<i>v.</i>)	to change from liquid to gas (p. 11)
grains (<i>n.</i>)	small, hard particles (p. 10)
mine (<i>n.</i>)	a place where minerals are taken from the ground by digging or blasting (p. 12)
mineral (<i>n.</i>)	a solid, natural material that does not come from a plant or animal (p. 4)
mummies (<i>n.</i>)	dried and preserved bodies of dead people or other animals
preserve (<i>v.</i>)	to treat in a special way to prevent spoiling (p. 7)
seasoning (<i>n.</i>)	something put on foods to add flavor (p. 6)
sodium (<i>n.</i>)	a soft metal found in salt (p. 6)

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