

Name _____ Date _____

Understanding Salt

Science and History

The value of salt has long been appreciated. For example, our word for *salt* comes from the Latin word for it, *sal*. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid part of their salaries in salt. Our word *salary* comes from the Latin word *salarium*, meaning “salt money.”

Why is salt so important? For one thing, human beings need it to live. So do plants and other animals. Most table salt is a compound called sodium chloride. It contains two chemical elements, sodium and chlorine. These substances play a key role in our bodies.

All body cells are bathed in a fluid that contains a salt solution. Sodium and chlorine are vital in the working of body cells. They help regulate the volume of blood that moves through the body. Sodium affects the volume of fluids retained, or held, in the body; and sodium chloride also helps supply ions. The ions are electrically charged atoms that are needed by the nerve cells.

In addition to table salt, sodium and chlorine are present in the food we eat, the water we drink, and in certain medicines. The amount of salt in the body is regulated by the kidneys. Salt is lost through body wastes, perspiration and tears.

Although the body must continually replace salt, many health experts today think that people in Western civilizations take in far more salt than is good for them. This can cause body tissue to become swollen, because it is holding too much liquid.

Doctors also believe that high blood pressure and some heart problems are related to too much salt. As a result, many of the food products being processed today contained reduced amounts of salt.

Directions: *Using the information above, under each heading below, write three facts about salt and the human body.*

Need for Salt

Loss of Salt

Intake of Salt

Too Much Salt
