

S4E53c Transcript

Ask Jack #8

Geoff Allix (00:02):

Hi, I'm Geoff Allix. Host of Living Well with MS family of podcasts from Overcoming MS.

Jack McNulty (00:07):

Hey everyone, Jack McNulty here. Welcome to another new and exciting season of Ask Jack, a special Living Well with MS podcast series. I'm excited and honored to answer food and cooking related questions from you. The overcoming MS community

Geoff Allix (00:22):

To submit a question for future episodes of Ask Jack, please email us at podcast@overcomingms.org, that's podcast@overcomingms.org. Please check out this episode's show notes at www.overcomingms.org/podcast, and dig into additional information and links on what we'll cover. And now let's rev up our culinary curiosity and Ask Jack.

Geoff Allix (00:45):

Our last episode was more of a meaty variety discussing all things to do with meat replacements. What do meat replacements generally contain a lot of? Salt. So it's only quite natural that we follow up with an episode on that. This episode is salt and salt replacements. So why do we devote a whole episode to a simple seasoning? Firstly, let's follow the science. HOLISM, as well as broader research suggests that it's healthier to reduce your sodium intake, especially if you have MS. Then there's the reality of our lives, particularly when first adopting the OMS program. Most people opt for the path of least resistance, which involves using more processed foods rather than cooking from scratch.

Geoff Allix (01:23):

When we use processed foods, we often don't dive into the ingredients as carefully and some of these foods contain excessive amounts of sodium. And finally, there's the obvious: salt is probably the most common food seasoning out there. And it does play a key role in making food taste better. So it's essential to understand the role salt plays in our food and our health. But also to explore alternatives, some of which might be better for us. Jack has carefully created several questions around this topic. We've solicited some directly from the OMS community. Thanks to Jack McNulty, we are about to get some answers. So Jack, welcome to the latest episode of Ask Jack.

Jack McNulty (02:02):

Thanks, Geoff. It's great to be back for another episode, really looking forward to today's discussion.

Geoff Allix (02:07):

And so we're talking about salt and it's something that's not necessarily at the forefront of the OMS program. I think people are thinking about meat, they're thinking about fat, they're thinking about dairy. So salt is an important consideration though. So, how much salt can we use within the OMS diet, and does too much salt affect MS?

Jack McNulty (02:35):

Hmm. Yeah. Two excellent questions to get started on our discussion today with respect to salt. Salt, with respect to OMS, yeah not even just with OMS, just in general terms, it's really kind of a confusing topic I think these days. And it's interesting to me because salt has been widely used in the human diet, really for thousands of years. It's had a reputation as one of the most important elements for humans. And there's no doubt that salt, perhaps more than anything else, has contributed more to human development than really than any other element. Yet today, for some reason, salt has taken on a new role. It's sort of a villain out there in the internet space. And there's just a lot of confusing information that portrays salt in a negative manner. And so maybe we can just start with that.

Jack McNulty (03:41):

Most people require about 1500 to 2000 milligrams of sodium per day. So let's just break that down. That's about five to seven grams or less than two teaspoons per day of salt. So we're talking about generally a small amount. But

because most people eat, at least the average person eats out a lot, they eat a lot of processed foods, eat a lot of bread, maybe some snacks, nuts, things like that. The average intake these days of sodium is actually about 10 to 15 times more than it should be, which is enormous. So is it really the sodium that's playing a part and should be the villain, or is it really the diet? And I suspect it's the latter, as opposed to the former. Really, if you cut back on those foods, then the intake levels will automatically go down and there's no reason then to limit sodium further unless you have some other underlying health issue issues.

Geoff Allix (05:03):

Yeah. Because you said two teaspoons, and I thought that's quite a lot. I don't think I'm putting two teaspoons of salt into my food, but it's actually not coming from me adding salt. It's coming from the processed foods, which are high in salt.

Jack McNulty (05:13):

Yeah, that's right. And you know, salt is basically in everything. And so yeah, maybe we don't necessarily salt our food so much. And in fact, I suspect that most people when they cook for themselves at home, they're actually under salting in my opinion, just from a seasoning perspective. So I don't have any great worries that people are going to just over consume salt. If they cut back on restaurant food, processed food, snacks, and bread is one of the biggest culprits of salt intake. Then it gets into a nice level. Too much salt of course could lead to other types of health issues, like cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, cancer, kidney issues, all kinds of things. There are important reasons to keep your sodium intake low. But before you get too crazy about dropping all your sodium, I think it's important to understand that salt is a requirement or sodium is required in our diet.

Jack McNulty (06:29):

We need it to regulate and balance the fluid levels in our blood and around our cells. And it plays a key role in nerve and muscle function. So it's really important to have sodium in your diet. Plus it actually makes food taste better, but we'll go into that a little bit later. Yeah, so it's really important I think to include sodium, but just be cautious as to how much you're actually putting into your system. With respect to OMS, the latest evidence really indicates that sodium intake has no bearing whatsoever on MS. It won't cause flares, or relapses, or anything like that. That's according to the latest evidence. Of course, I'm not a doctor, I'm just a cook. So I follow it closely, but I encourage people to do their own research in that area. But according to the latest information and I do talk a lot about it. Yeah, sodium isn't a big player with respect to MS.

Geoff Allix (07:42):

But in terms of MS, we should always be wary of comorbidities. So the last thing you want to have, if you've got MS, is high blood pressure, heart disease.

Jack McNulty (07:58):

That's exactly right. All good reasons to limit sodium intake to where it should be on a daily basis. And again, that should be no problem for most people, if you're really reducing some of the major causes. Processed foods are a big contributor, also restaurant food, and bread.

Geoff Allix (08:22):

Okay. So you said that actually it does make food taste good. So what in what role does salt play in that sort of area? Because I've often heard that actually on cooking programs, they say, "Oh, this is under seasoned."

Jack McNulty (08:42):

Yeah. Don't ever cut the chef when they say that though, some chefs tend to go a little bit too far.

Geoff Allix (08:52):

But what does it bring to food?

Jack McNulty (08:55):

Yeah. Well, salt has a number of different culinary uses. Let's just back up for a second and just kind of go into what salt is. First of all, salt is just sodium chloride. It's a simple inorganic material. And it all comes originally from the oceans. These days there's about 50% coming from the ocean, and about 50% coming from rock mines. So from the rock salt, that's basically a residual salt from the rock that was once an ocean, but now is perhaps part of a mountain or something of this nature. And that's how that rock got into those particular mines. It is important to add flavor to food, but it's also important to understand that salt itself doesn't add flavor, it enhances flavor. It's really the only natural source that we have that contributes to one of our basic tastes.

Jack McNulty (10:06):

And of course that's salt. So we have salt, we have acid, we have bitter and we have sweet. Those are the four basic ones of course; umami is the fifth one that's recognized these days. But salt plays some other roles. It's not just contributing to enhancing flavor. It enhances aroma in our mouth also. So the presence of salt will enhance aroma sensations in our mouths. It balances bitter sensations, so you can imagine eating a piece of bitter lettuce or something like this. Try it at home, it's really fascinating. You eat it you go, "Oh, that's pretty bitter." You sprinkle just a tiny amount of salt on it. And you'll be amazed at how that balances and almost brings out a sweet characteristic in the lettuce.

Geoff Allix (10:59):

So the classic salt and vinegar flavor combination.

Jack McNulty (11:01):

Exactly. Just creating that balance in your mouth. That's what you're driving towards with salt. And that's why people tend when they under season, that's what a chef is going to look for. And that's why they say, "Oh, that doesn't have enough salt." Because they're looking for that balance in their mouths. If there's one of those elements that plays too prominent of a role, for instance, it's too acidic or often times it's too bitter, a little pinch of salt will bring that balance in the mouth and you'll immediately notice it.

Jack McNulty (11:38):

I'll give you an example. I was just traveling in Italy. One of the regions I visited was Tuscany, and Tuscany is renowned for baking their bread without salt, which is really fascinating. And it's quite shocking if you weren't aware of that going into the game. You eat a piece of bread and go, "Whoa, that tastes different." There's no aroma. It tastes very flat and you go, "What is that?" And it's because there's no salt in the bread. And then there's a reason for that. It's kind of an interesting history.

Jack McNulty (12:12):

It has to go back to the Roman days and salt taxes and whatnot, and then Tuscans decided not to pay any salt tax. So they started making their bread without salt. And to this day, it's still done. Interesting little side note there. But salt also plays some other roles. So it helps draw a liquid out of food through a process called osmosis. So to give an example, when I'm sauteing onions for instance, the beginning of most recipes. Just in a dry pan, I usually will add a pinch of salt to those onions as they hit the pan. And what that does is it draws the moisture out of the onions and they begin stewing in their own juices. So I don't add any water to the pan. I just allow that natural process to occur. And that seasoning goes into the onions, penetrates the cell walls, softens them quicker and drives flavor directly into the onion or whatever I happen to be cooking.

Jack McNulty (13:22):

It's a very useful ingredient or element to use in that particular process. But of course, salt also discourages the growth of bacteria. Very important when you're talking about pickling and fermenting. Which is one of the main culinary roles of salt. And so it will change flavor, think of how a cucumber gets changed into a pickle for instance. And that's just done with the cucumber in a brine solution of water and salt. And that's generally a basic pickling that will completely change the structure of the cucumber and turn it into something completely different, with a little bit of an acidic punch to it. So salt as a seasoner, you're looking at flavor enhancers, you're looking at aroma enhancers, and balancing bitter components. From the perspective of drawing out liquid, something like sweating

onions, you can replace some of that salt just by using a lower heat and increasing the time element. In terms of pickling and fermentation, that's the other role for salt and of course there are alternatives to that as well.

Geoff Allix (14:54):

So what if someone is looking to reduce their salt intake in their own cooking. What are some suggestions that you'd have to replace salt in cooking? Are there salt substitutions that they can use?

Jack McNulty (15:11):

Yeah, well, let's break that down. From a flavor perspective or enhancing aroma, there are things that you can do by adding herbs and spices for instance, creating a lot more flavor that way. Of course, when you do that, recognize that herbs and spices are going to add in most cases, even more bitterness. So taking the salt out, adding that it's going to provide a little bit more bitter flavor in your food and some people need to get used to that. Acids would be another thing to add to food, to enhance flavors and aroma. Things like lemon, vinegar, tamarind, which is very nice. I use pomegranate molasses a lot and that will increase the acid amount in the food and sometimes create a situation where you don't necessarily need a more salt. It just adds a flavor punch.

Jack McNulty (16:10):

You can use brines, which will have some naturally occurring salts still in the brine. So brine from sauerkraut, or kimchi, or something like this, just a teaspoon of that functions the same as adding some salt. But your sodium content will be less. And one of my favorite ways also is just using seaweed. Things like dulse, and kelp, or even just nori sheets broken up, because that will have some natural sodium. Or introducing naturally sodium rich products such as sunflower or other ingredients that grow in sodium rich soil.

Geoff Allix (16:55):

So if you are... So we're talking about sodium, but if you're cooking with something like sunflower, or people who eat fish, there's a natural saltiness to some fish. To certainly sunflowers or vegetables that grow, there's seaweeds as you mentioned, is that not the same as adding salt to something?

Jack McNulty (17:22):

It is, but it will occur in lower concentrations.

Geoff Allix (17:25):

Okay.

Jack McNulty (17:26):

So you're not going to have the same amount as if put in a one or two teaspoons of salt into your soup or something like that. So it's going to be much more diluted.

Geoff Allix (17:37):

Okay. So it's worth saying, "Okay, I really can't eat sunflower or I can't eat mackerel or something those sort of things that might have natural salt in them."

Jack McNulty (17:48):

Yeah. I mean there are other ingredients too, capers for instance, which are either salt or vinegar cured. Those are going to give you a little bit of a salt punch as well. Things like that you can use to increase the amount of salt. And again, that's just for flavor enhancement or adding aromas and things like that.

Jack McNulty (18:10):

If you're doing something that you want to draw liquid, the only thing that you really can do there is really slowing down the process. So just use lower heat, longer cooking times. Because really what you're trying to do there is just break down the food element that you're cooking a little bit more. And that just requires a little bit of time. You want to use a lower temperature to prevent it from really burning, but you can still do that with onions for instance, you

can soften them easily without adding salt to them. I do that because I like adding the flavor and it speeds the process up a little bit more.

Jack McNulty (18:46):

If you're doing something with pickling or fermentation, you have to look for alternatives. So some alternatives would be using the starter culture, something like a yogurt base or something of that nature. Or a kefir or some other kind of brine that you've successfully used. And just adding a little bit of that will stimulate the fermentation or pickling process.

Geoff Allix (19:10):

Could you, so I make sauerkraut. And so you could start with salt of that, but could I use the liquid from the previous week's sauerkraut to start the next week's?

Jack McNulty (19:22):

Yes you could, yeah.

Geoff Allix (19:23):

Okay.

Jack McNulty (19:25):

You might need to still... Sauerkraut I mean, this is where salt really comes in to play an important role when it has to do with bacteria and things like that. So one of the reasons why sauerkraut has a fairly high salt amount is to protect that bacteria from forming. It eliminates harmful bacteria but creates good bacteria in the food itself. And that's why it's important to always keep that underwater, not allow the air to come in and whatnot. If you're just using the brine from the last time, you have to just really ensure that just stays in a cool place and it's submerged all the time. But it may take a little bit longer because there won't be quite as much salt in there just from that, but you could do that.

Geoff Allix (20:18):

And we had a question from a member of our community, Sarah Bennett, who wanted to know your thoughts on these salt alternatives they're marketing, sort of low salt or low sodium salts. And I believe they're potassium chloride. So what are your thoughts on using those instead of traditional salt?

Jack McNulty (20:43):

Yeah, it's mostly potassium chloride, which is often used in those low salt or so-called light foods, like light soy sauce or something like that. It is basically replacing the sodium with potassium. So potassium in this case would be odorless, it's weak in its flavor, and the one drawback can leave a sort of bitter or metallic aftertaste. It's mostly used in products, like low sodium salt, when it's combined with the sodium. So it's basically just diluting the sodium that's there and reducing the amount of sodium, but still functions a little bit like salt would. But again, you're going to have that little bit of an aftertaste. For me personally, I'm not a big fan of that because I place a lot of importance on the actual flavors and things of that nature.

Geoff Allix (21:46):

And would it work to do the actual sort of process of breaking down the onion or the cabbage in sauerkraut? Does it do that?

Jack McNulty (21:58):

Yeah. So lower sodium alternatives can enhance the taste and flavor just like salt. It can also help in preserves and ferments, so you can use it in that particular environment as well. Just be aware that little flavor amount and it's often also quite fine. There are two other considerations, it's quite fine so people tend to overuse it. So it's very easy to sprinkle too much on. And then you're sort of defeating the purpose because you're trying to create that flavor enhancement. And so you put a little bit too much.

Jack McNulty (22:38):

So it's almost like the seatbelt thing, when seatbelt laws came in to affect, people wore the seatbelt. But then they felt like they can drive faster or crazier and get into more wrecks. It's a little bit like that in the sense that it gives you the safeguard, "Well I'm using low sodium." But then you use too much, and so you're defeating the purpose. And it also tends to have more preservatives or additives in lower salt solutions. So, I would prefer using something pure.

Geoff Allix (23:13):

Yes. And there's another mentioned I've never heard of called liquid aminos.

Jack McNulty (23:17):

Yeah. Liquid aminos. Well first of all, there are two kinds of liquid aminos, two major kinds. So the first is made with coconut product and it's basically just fermenting coconut sap with salt and water. And it creates something very similar to soy sauce, but with roughly 60% less sodium. So you have a product that you can use similar to soy sauce, but with far less sodium in a natural way. And just because it says coconut aminos, I know we have a big thing in the OMS world about coconut. It has nothing to do with coconut fat. And so coconut aminos are perfectly fine within the OMS lifestyle.

Jack McNulty (24:09):

The other kind of amino is generally made with soya beans and is treating the soybeans with sort of an acidic solution and salt. And the soya based aminos function the same way as a coconut amino. But rather than having less salt, it actually has higher amounts of salt than soya sauce or tamari. So if you want to use aminos, I think it's pretty important to understand which one you're using, and how you want to use that. So they're not created equally. And in this particular case, I would say that the coconut amino would probably function a little bit better than the other type when just considering sodium. Also, aminos tend not to have a lot of preservatives, which is another plus when you're looking at that.

Geoff Allix (25:08):

I'd like to just make a quick update before getting to our next question about salt. The Big Picnic is happening this July, and it's an OMS tradition for encouraging our community to prepare delicious OMS friendly foods to share with others as a way of raising awareness about the OMS diet. And the Ask Jack podcast already exposed you to loads of new cooking recipes and recipe ideas. And in case you need a refresher, you can find many tasty, healthy and OMS friendly recipes on the OMS website. As well as on Jack's website, myfreshattitude.com. Hopefully these recipes will inspire you for your OMS Big Picnic. And you can get more info on the Big Picnic on the OMS website, or please check the show notes for this episode, which will have more info.

Geoff Allix (25:53):

So back to the questions about salt though. So when I was young, there was salt. And it came in a plastic tub and that was what was available. Now, there are loads of types of salts. So there's sea salt, there's rock salt, kosher salt, fleur de sel, colored salts, kala namak, so there's lots and lots of different types of salts. So firstly is there much difference? Where I grew up actually is a big sea salt area, there is Maldon sea salt, which is sort of well-known in the area. Is there a difference between sea salt and rock salt? Are these different things or is it basically the same thing?

Jack McNulty (26:40):

Let's break it down. We just kind of do a salt 101 here. So the first thing to recognize is salt is salt, period. Meaning it's all sodium chloride, no matter the color, moisture content, crystal size, any marketing health claims that are out there, salt is salt. It's just sodium chloride. Doesn't matter if it's coming from the sea or coming from a rock mine. There is no regulation worldwide on how salt is packaged or any health claims made that may be made stating for instance, that this particular salt has some amazing health benefit. Throw all of that out the window. And what you're left with is sodium chloride, which is where it should be. But there are differences to consider, and those would be crystal size and shape. That's important in seasoning and dissolving. It's also important when reading a recipe. And most cookbooks aren't going to tell you these sorts of things, but salt changes in terms of its mass or volume, the type of salt that's being used.

Jack McNulty (28:00):

So don't trust cookbooks. When they say you need a teaspoon of salt here, but what a teaspoon of sea salt is going to be is considerably different than a teaspoon of say, table salt. And we'll go into the differences in a minute. There's also, the other considerations are, are additives. Does it have any sort of anti-caking additives added to it? I think regulations state that up to 2% of table salt, for instance, can be an additive. Some kind of chemical or element that's going to prevent the salt from clumping or caking up. Then there's the whole iodine question. Does it have iodine added to it or not? Then some salts have different flavors added to it. So those are not naturally occurring and they're basically just added flavor, rosemary salt, lemon salt, that sort of stuff.

Jack McNulty (28:57):

So the other thing you want to look at is what's left in the salt. So in some salts that are gray, for instance, they're unwashed, and they may have some organic or mineral impurities that are left in the salt intentionally. And those would be certain kinds of sea salts. So let's start there for a minute Geoff.

Jack McNulty (29:21):

Sea salt, that's the first one that I'm going to talk about. There's refined and unrefined sea salt, and that's what is the big difference. The refined sea salts are mostly going to be removing the bitter minerals that are left behind after the harvesting. And that's usually done by dissolving and adding sodium hydroxide and carbon dioxide to the brine. That's going to remove any natural magnesium and calcium that's in the salt, and then allowed to just sort of naturally evaporate. And then it becomes harvested and dried and packaged in that particular sense.

Jack McNulty (30:04):

So an unrefined salt is going to be much slower than a refined salt. It's basically just made through a progressive concentration of sea water that is just naturally evaporated. So it's moved from basically one pond to another, the concentration of salt increases as it's moved from one to another. And then as evaporation takes place, it just concentrates more until the salt is basically left at the top. So at the very, very top you'll have some natural flakes that are formed, and that's called the flower of the salt, and that's fleur de sel. And so as that's raked off or harvested before it has a chance to sink and mix in with other elements. It's a kind of a pure flake form of sea salt.

Jack McNulty (31:02):

Unwashed sea salts may have a little bit of algae, clay, magnesium, and calcium in them. Sometimes they have a gray color. That's very common in France, for instance. With French types of sea salt, that sea salt is allowed to just sort of sink to the bottom. And then as it's mixed a little bit with the clay in the bottom of the seabed, wherever it is, it takes on this particular color. And it takes on some of the attributes of that clay. So it actually may have little lumps of clay in it. And of course, we talked about the fleur de sel just now. So that's sea salt.

Jack McNulty (31:49):

Table salt is basically either processed rock or sea salt. There's no regulation. So if you come across something that just says table salt, you don't really know what it is unless it's stated on the package. And it's basically those small cubic sort of uniform crystals that you might see in any restaurant saltshaker. The really fine kind of salt, that's a table salt. It dissolves well, but as a seasoning it's not the best in the world because it doesn't evenly cover the food. It doesn't just stick on the food; it basically can go in different clumps depending on how you put it on the food. So it's a little bit tricky to season with and most...

Geoff Allix (32:37):

Because it's fine, would it work quite well for say baking? Something where it needs to be mixed in really well? Because I personally wouldn't use something like a salt grinder for making bread. Because the bits of salt are too big.

Jack McNulty (32:54):

Yeah, I tend to use a finer salt in baking recipes or something of that nature. Or dissolving in pasta water, for instance, I will go with a finer kind of salt. Whether that's technically a table salt or not is probably up for argument in terms

of how you want to label it. I tend not to buy the really fine table salts because they generally have a lot of additives in them, which I'm not a big fan of in terms of anti-clumping material, and things like that.

Jack McNulty (33:39):

So kosher salt would be the next one. So kosher salt is mostly available in the United States. It's really hard to find kosher salt throughout Europe or perhaps in Australia. I'm not 100% sure, but I doubt it. It's a salt that's used during the kosher process. It has nothing really to do with being kosher at all.

Geoff Allix (34:01):

I was going to say, because I'm not Jewish, but I would've thought salt was kosher. But it's not the kosherness of the salt, it's the use of it in the...

Jack McNulty (34:12):

Exactly, so traditionally it was used by butchers that cleaned the meat of all the blood. And then they would have a fine layer of salt over the meat to enhance drawing out of more blood and liquid from whatever they're making as kosher. So that's really the traditional use and that's why it's called kosher salt. But the nice aspect about it is it's generally a coarse salt with flaky crystals that cover the food evenly. And that's why it was favored by these butchers. But it's also one reason why it's very much favored, especially in America with chefs, because it's very easy to season with it. You can grab it easily, then you can season food just by sprinkling it on. And a lot of people like using it that particular way, that's a very popular salt. So there are no regulations, sometimes it has iodine added to it and sometimes not. Generally kosher salt has no other kind of additive in it, no anti-clumping stuff, that sort of thing.

Jack McNulty (35:28):

I think it's probably the number one salt that's used in most households in America. Although I could be wrong on that. I know growing up, I also had the same thing as you, it was always Morton salt and a little blue container that was very fine. I remember that completely.

Jack McNulty (35:48):

So rock salt would be the next one. And rock salt mostly refers to just larger chunks of salt with both culinary and non-culinary uses. It's often used to make ice cream or recipes requiring some kind of crunchy salt on top of a baked good or pretzels, something like that. And it's often sold for grinders as if putting salt in a grinder is going to create some sort of mystery benefit. All it does really is just make the salt smaller, that's it. It does nothing else other than that.

Geoff Allix (36:30):

I mean, so well you have... Well so my wife's got, she likes Himalayan rock salt, which we'll go into, there's no benefits to it. But we do get a choice of how big the grains are. So because it's in a grinder you can actually, you can have fine or coarse. So there is a benefit to that. To be fair...

Jack McNulty (36:56):

Sure. And you can hold the grinder over food like a pepper mill. You can control how much and where it goes on food and that sort of thing. It would be generally sort of a post-seasoning. I don't know if it would be really good as you're cooking to use a grinder, but that's just my own personal opinion on that.

Jack McNulty (37:19):

Pickling salt is another common salt that you, that might be out there. And it's very fine grained. It's always without iodine or any anti-caking ingredient added to it. Those tend to create cloudy brines, and that's why it's always sold without that. So it's always going to dissolve well, and it's always going to keep liquids clean. So if you come across a pickling salt, that would be what that is. And it's generally just rock salt that's really fine. Or it could be sea salt that's also very fine.

Jack McNulty (37:55):

Flaky salts, which I think you talked about Maldon earlier is the most, and that's the most famous of the flaky salt.

Geoff Allix (38:02):

So is it actually heard of internationally, isn't it? I've heard of it because that's where I grew up.

Jack McNulty (38:11):

I'm sure it's available in America, it's definitely available here. I can get my hands on it pretty easily. But it's like of all flaky salts, Maldon just happens to be really famous, but it's just salt crystals with large surface area. And they're often brittle and quite crunchy. So they're excellent finishing salts. Most people don't cook with Maldon salt. They crumble a little if you will, on top of the food and it gives you that little crunchy salt hit, which some people find quite appealing, me included. Kala namak of course, most of us have heard of that. And if you're cooking vegan at all, you probably come across it.

Geoff Allix (39:00):

I would say I'd never heard of it prior to cooking. But now that I do things like a scrambled tofu, then it's essential.

Jack McNulty (39:11):

Exactly. So it's a black salt that's mined in Himalayas, but it's only mined in India. And it's the reason why it has its color, and it's sort of sulfur property is, it's after the rock salt is mined, it's cooked in a kiln. And this changes the trace elements to create sort of this sulfur compound. And that's why it has that particular lovely aroma of rotten eggs. Some people actually like that quite a bit, but it worked well towards the end of the cooking process. In a tofu scramble, as you alluded to. It doesn't hold the flavor very long in cooking. So if you start with it in the cooking process, you're going to be disappointed in the actual aroma. If you use it towards the end of the cooking process, it's much more effective. So if I'm making a tofu scramble, I would add a little bit of normal salt first and then just season at the end with it to give that sort of boost of egginess.

Jack McNulty (40:26):

So the other salt that you alluded to of course, is the Himalayan pink salt. And let's just put it out there, despite the claims there's absolutely no evidence of any health promoting aspect of Himalayan pink salt. So the reason why it's special is it's excavated by hand, no machinery involved, in mines in Pakistan. So it's only coming from Pakistan. The color comes from trace elements found in the mine. So it can range from light pink to almost a bright red. It can come in different sizes. But unfortunately, people just seem to be eager for untapped sources of health benefits. And I think it's easy to fall for the marketing claims that were made about Himalayan pink salt, and dissolving it as aroma therapy in spas, or using it in food, and things like this. It's still sodium chloride bottom line, and there's nothing immensely special about it other than it's a pretty cool color.

Geoff Allix (41:43):

Right, so it looks nice in a glass grinder you can see, looks nice on the table.

Jack McNulty (41:52):

Totally agree with that, Geoff. But is it worth the extra price? I think that's a decision that we all have to come to terms with ultimately.

Geoff Allix (42:01):

And when you get these big, huge, great big pieces of salt, which are a lovely color, and they suppose you have psychic abilities, then that's probably beyond either of our knowledge.

Jack McNulty (42:14):

I've not heard of the psychic abilities.

Geoff Allix (42:15):

Oh yeah. There's big pieces, large and they're quite often lit and they apparently are good for, I'm not sure what chakras are.

Jack McNulty (42:26):

The other thing just to be aware of is, contrary to health benefits there's actually something detrimental found in a lot of Himalayan pink salts. They can have fairly high levels of lead as a trace element. And so that's just something to be aware of when deciding to include or not include a pink salt in your diet.

Geoff Allix (42:55):

And you wouldn't know this, it wouldn't say?

Jack McNulty (42:57):

No, right.

Geoff Allix (42:58):

No, okay.

Jack McNulty (43:01):

No. But now we're getting into sort of edgy territory because when you think about it, the majority of salt these days, or at least 50% is coming from the sea. And unfortunately most of those salts these days are going to be contaminated with microplastics. Which of course aren't going to be mentioned either, but that's just a fact of life with anything coming out the seas these days. You're going to be exposing yourselves to microplastic, which is an unfortunate byproduct of the human condition these days.

Geoff Allix (43:37):

Yeah. I was thinking of Maldon sea salt, I'd absolutely promote it because it's from where I grew up. But it is quite near to the Thames Estuary, which is the river that flows out of London. Which might have some trace elements of things in it. And it's also on the North Sea, which just has a number of major industrial areas flow into it.

Geoff Allix (44:00):

So if we could sort of wrap up, what I take from this is actually the biggest takeaway that I've got is the best thing we could do is reduce our consumption of processed food. And if we're, if someone's eating out on every meal, then they might be getting a lot of salt, I'm assuming. If we're having the occasional meal out, you can probably have an idea of what's likely to be. Sort of think, "Well okay, if I can see what the ingredients are and then they might be cooked in something salty. But there's not going to be a huge amount of salt." So basically we're looking at that processed food and bread as sort of big areas it's coming from. Not to worry too much about actually using salt in cooking. Would that be...

Jack McNulty (45:01):

Yeah, I think that's a good place to land with respect to salt and sodium intake. Sodium is not as much of a villain as most people want to make it out to be. Of course too much is going to create problems. As we talked about earlier, too much of most anything is going to eventually create problems. But too much sodium clearly is a problem within the human diet. And it's easy to cut back just by cutting back on some of the lifestyle choices that most people make. And that of course is a major element of the OMS program anyway. So if you're sticking to that, I mean not going out to eat all the time, really watching your processed foods, not having a lot of snacks that are littered with salt, then you're probably not going to have to worry too much about over salting your food when you're cooking at home.

Jack McNulty (46:06):

As long as you're buying products that are generally low in salt to begin with. And that usually means whole foods, so that's a great place to start. I think that there are some other factors to consider when you're looking at what salt to purchase. The dissolving aspect, how easily does it dissolve in liquids? Often salt is needed in soups or pasta water or something like this. And so dissolving becomes a consideration. Iodine would be another consideration. Let's face it, iodine, I'll just say my own perspective on iodine.

Jack McNulty (46:55):

So this is my view, I eat very few processed foods. I eat out rarely, I often bake my own bread. I live in Europe and I know that the soil here is iodine poor. And so if I'm not using iodine salt to some degree, I'm probably not getting enough iodine in my diet. Which is actually the fact according to some of the blood tests that I've taken over the years. And so I will use at times iodine salt just for this particular reason. And so that's a personal decision that everybody has to come to and understand what's your own situation like. But having iodine in the salt, that's no big thing in my opinion. And that's something maybe we should encourage a little bit more.

Jack McNulty (47:55):

I think the other thing to consider is seasoning before or after, as a flavor enhancer. How am I going to use that particular salt? I'll run it down so what I have always in my kitchen is, I have a fine iodized sea or rock salt on hand that I use when I'm putting salt in pasta water or baking, or if I'm creating some kind of brine or something of that nature, that's the salt I would use. When I'm just using a primary seasoning salt, I always have on hand a fine sea salt or something like a gray sea salt. That's going to be milled a little bit finer so it spreads out rather evenly. As a finishing salt, I will always have some kind of flaky salt or fleur de sel. I usually have two or three different kinds depending on my mood. And I always have some kala namak on hand. I don't tend to have any pink salt on hand. And so that's basically my opinion as a cook. And that's what I tend to have. I usually have in my pantry have about six or seven different kinds of salts.

Geoff Allix (49:20):

Okay. I think I've learned an awful lot from that. And with that, thank you for yet another fascinating episode, Jack.

Jack McNulty (49:27):

Well, thanks Geoff. It's good, it's really excellent. I could probably talk about salt way longer than most people want to hear about it.

Geoff Allix (49:37):

And so we're looking forward to your return for the next Ask Jack episode, which is in the autumn or fall, as you would call it. And that will premiere on the 28th of September. So if there's any questions anyone would like answered, then do please get in touch. You can email podcast@overcomingms.org, and until then have a great low salt summer.

Jack McNulty (50:02):

Thanks, Geoff. And I'd just like to remind everybody that be sure to check the OMS website under podcast if you want any of the show notes, which we will put up once the podcast appears on the website.

Geoff Allix (50:15):

Okay. Thanks very much.

Geoff Allix (50:20):

Thanks for listening to this episode of Ask Jack. Please check out this episode's show notes at www.overcomingms.org/podcast, where you'll find all sorts of useful links and bonus information. If you'd like to submit a question for a future episode of Ask Jack, please email us at podcast@overcomingms.org.

Geoff Allix (50:39):

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Geoff Allix (51:34):

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