



Super Salt Me

To test the anti-sodium argument in extremis, a would-be Morgan Spurlock gorges himself on all things salty for nine straight days.

BY JOSHUA DAVID STEIN

I normally follow what you could call a typical New Yorker's health regimen: lots of restaurant food, occasional guilty forays into fast-food land, plenty of exercise, and a moderate amount of drinking. So when I set out, in the name of investigative journalism, on a nine-day high-sodium bender, I was, to say the least, concerned. Before starting my experiment, I consulted **Dr. Jeffrey Morrison**, an integrative-health specialist, to establish that I wouldn't, you know, kill myself. After checking my blood pressure (110/70), body-fat percentage (9.6; the national male average is 17), urine (slightly alkaline, i.e., good), and liver, kidney, and white-blood-cell and intra- and intercellular-fluid levels (all normal), **Morrison** declared me "the perfect specimen of health." He was reasonably certain I wouldn't die.

DAY 1 → **8:47 a.m.:** I wake up feeling great: slept for eight hours, my skin is clear, lots of energy. Breakfast is ham and cheese on a Cheddar biscuit at Amy's Bread. Salty enough, but I can do better. **12:25 p.m.:** Hit the Breslin for a business lunch. If there's one place to out-salt oneself, it's here. I start with the caramel popcorn, then order a crock of baked beans with pork fat and a larger crock of onion-and-bone-marrow soup. **6:06 p.m.:** I have a headache and skip dinner.

DAY 2 → **9:57 a.m.:** My head is pounding. **Morrison** says as my sodium level rises, my body will compensate by sapping other electrolytes and minerals, causing a general feeling of crumminess. Breakfast is a sausage-and-cheese omelette with home fries from Nisos, a cheap Chelsea diner. **1:34 p.m.:** The grains of salt on my French fries at Bill's Bar & Burger loom grotesquely large. Am I even hungry? **9:05 p.m.:** I'm belchy and spend 30 minutes in the bathroom.

DAYS 3-6 → My energy is sagging. I've got an angry zit right between my eyes. Thanks to my now-acute stomach cramps, I'm mean, and so my wife, Ana, and I bicker more. I leave her behind en route to New Mexico to visit family and follow the Green Chile Cheeseburger Trail, a veritable hajj for saltivores. Total four-day tally: five green-chile cheeseburgers, five sides of fries (four straight, one curly), an order of "Later Gems," three breakfast burritos, one pork-shoulder tamale, six Auntie Anne's Pretzel Stix. I detect noticeable mood swings. Or maybe that's just from visiting my mother.

DAY 7 → **11:30 a.m.:** Back in New York and desperately in need of a detox. I sleep late and dream of greens. My stomach, which was passably taut a week ago, is now visibly doughy.

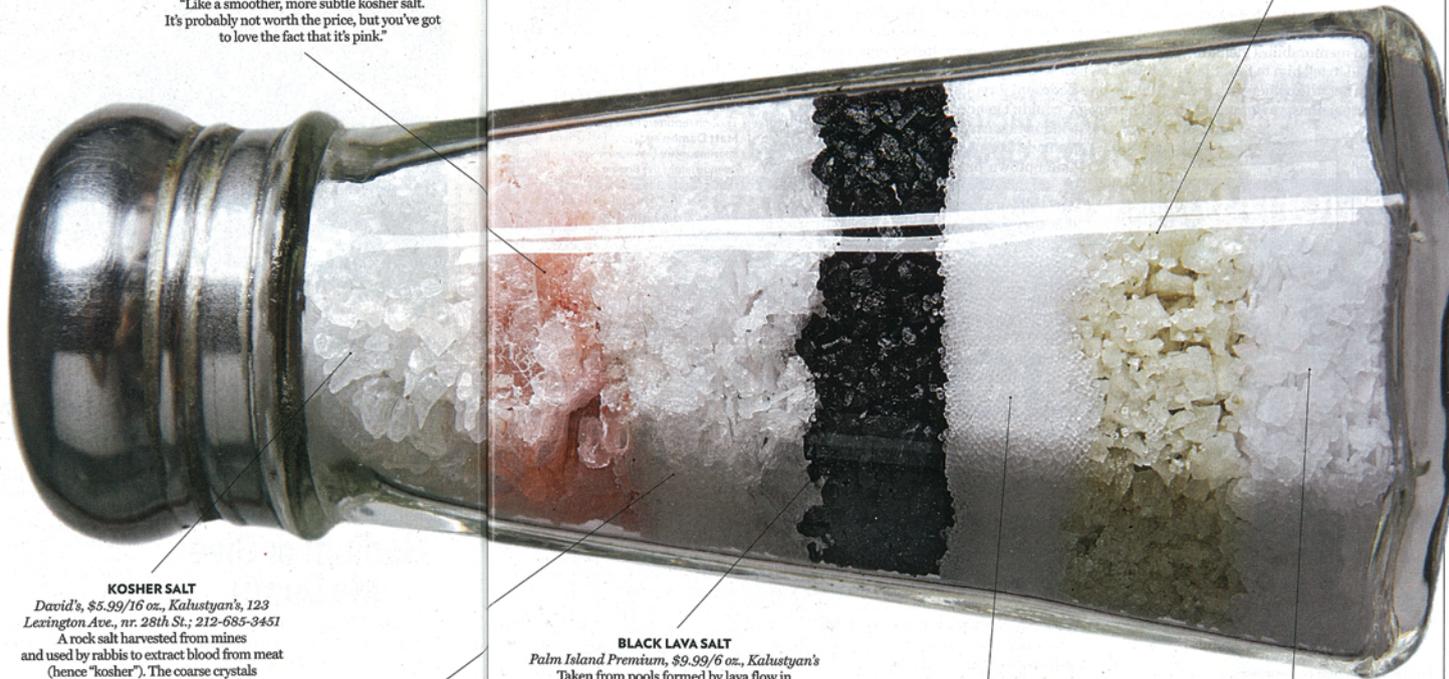
DAY 8 → **9:52 p.m.:** With the end in sight, I make my last meal at Diner, where even the salads come with bacon and a fried egg on top. My taste buds are so damaged, everything has the same salty taste.

DAY 9 → **8 a.m.:** Meet with **Dr. Morrison** for my post-experiment checkup. My sodium and chloride levels are nearing the upper range. My urine has gotten more acidic, and although I didn't feel it, I'm dehydrated. The level of fluid in my cells is still fine, but that's only because of my good level of health to begin with. "The really striking thing," says **Morrison**, "is that you lost two pounds of muscle and gained two pounds of fat." What if I were to continue my salt binge for, say, a year? "Every year on a high-sodium, high-saturated-fat diet," he says, "takes three months off your life." By that math, I may have just shortened my life expectancy by 2.25 days—my last weekend on Earth. I leave **Dr. Morrison's** and head for the salad bar.

HIMALAYAN PINK SALT

\$20 a rock, *Tools for Living*, 142 Wooster St., nr. Prince St.; 212-471-0280

Known for extreme purity—thanks to the remote mountain location—and a pretty hue imparted by trace deposits of iron. Hand-harvesting adds to the high cost. **Taste?** "Like a smoother, more subtle kosher salt. It's probably not worth the price, but you've got to love the fact that it's pink."



KOSHER SALT

David's, \$5.99/16 oz., *Kalustyan's*, 123 Lexington Ave., nr. 28th St.; 212-685-3451

A rock salt harvested from mines and used by rabbis to extract blood from meat (hence "kosher"). The coarse crystals contain few additives and adhere well to food.

Good for seasoning. **Taste?** "A smooth, unaggressive salt, with a nice texture."

ENGLISH FLAKE SALT

Maldon, \$7.99/8.5 oz., *Gourmet Garage*, 453 Broome St., at Mercer St.; 212-941-5850

From the highly saline waters of the River Blackwater, Maldon's thin, flat crystals are usually sprinkled on a finished dish, and resemble squays. They dissolve pleasantly on the tongue. **Taste?** "I'd put it on something like smoked salmon. Featherly, almost translucent crystals, like snowflakes. Easily my favorite."

Salts of the Earth

"Texture, the rate that it dissolves, the flavor that it imparts, the appearance"—that's what distinguishes great salt, says Dan Soloway, owner of the wholesale spice company Kitchen Options. Below, we explain the differences among seven types, from plastic-shaker-grade table salt to tenderly harvested sel gris, and our chief food critic, *Adam Platt*, puts them to the test.

GRAY SALT

Bay of Bengal, \$4.99/8 oz., *Kalustyan's* Moist and often briny, "much like the ocean," says Soloway. The granules adopt a gray-green color from trace minerals and clay. Works best with seafood. **Taste?** "Harsher than the others. The grayish color makes it look like it's been sifted through concrete."

BLACK LAVA SALT

Palm Island Premium, \$9.99/6 oz., *Kalustyan's*

Taken from pools formed by lava flow in Hawaii, this salt is dark even before producers add charcoal to intensify the blackness and smokiness. Ideal for plank-cooking or grilling.

Taste? "Piercing, aggressive; like I'm sprinkling charcoal on my eggs."

TABLE SALT

Morton Iodized Salt, \$-.99/26 oz., *Walgreens* (multiple locations)

Another rock variety, table salt often contains iodine, introduced as a dietary supplement in the twenties. Sensitive palates can sometimes detect bitter undertones. **Taste?** "There's a slight chemical backtaste. Lacks the crunch, crystal mouthfeel we salt freaks covet."

TRAPANI SEA SALT

Victoria Taylor's Seasonings, \$11.99/10 oz., *Kalustyan's*

"People have been collecting this since the Phoenicians," says Soloway. Trapani rakes its nearly pure salt—98 percent sodium chloride—from evaporated coastal pools. **Taste?** "Sharp and clear, with almost too rocky a texture. Could use several turns through the grinder."

—ALEXANDRA VALLIS