Sea salt has some health benefits, but won’t lower your sodium content one bit.

Sea salt has boomed in popularity in restaurants and supermarket aisles across the country. Many gourmet chefs say they prefer it over table salt for its coarse, crunchy texture and stronger flavor. Manufacturers are using it in potato chips and other snacks because it’s “all natural,” and not processed like table salt. And some health-conscious consumers choose it because it contains minerals like magnesium.

Each of the above-mentioned characteristics may set sea salt apart from table salt, but in one other very important respect there’s absolutely no difference between the two: sodium content.

Sea salt and sodium content

Both sea salt and table salt contain about 40 percent sodium. Unfortunately, many consumers haven’t gotten that message. In an April 2011 survey by the American Heart Association, 61 percent of respondents said they believed sea salt is a low-sodium alternative to table salt.

“It’s very important for people to be aware that sea salt has as much sodium as table salt,” said Rachel K. Johnson, Ph.D., R.D., an AHA spokeswoman and the Bickford Professor of Nutrition at the University of Vermont.

“One of the keys to maintaining a heart-healthy diet is to control your sodium intake,” she said. “If you’re consuming more sea salt than you otherwise would because you think it has less sodium, then you may be placing yourself at higher risk of developing high blood pressure, which raises your risk of heart disease.”

What’s the difference?

Sea salt is obtained directly through the evaporation of seawater. It is usually not processed, or undergoes minimal processing, and therefore retains trace levels of minerals like magnesium, potassium, calcium and other nutrients.

Table salt, on the other hand, is mined from salt deposits and then processed to give it a fine texture so it’s easier to mix and use in recipes. Processing strips table salt of any minerals it may have contained, and additives are also usually incorporated to prevent clumping or caking.

While these attributes may make sea salt more attractive from a marketing standpoint, Johnson says there are no real health advantages of sea salt. “The minute amounts of trace minerals found in sea salt are easily obtained from other healthy foods,” Johnson said. “Sea salt also generally contains less iodine than table salt. Iodine has been added to table salt since the 1920s to prevent the iodine-deficiency disease goiter.”

The next time you find yourself choosing between sea salt and table salt, remember that it’s probably mostly a matter of letting your tastebuds decide. But whichever option you choose, keep in mind that both contain the same amount of sodium, and remember that the American Heart Association recommends limiting sodium intake to no more than 1,500 milligrams a day.