

# The G4G Guide: Sodium



This guide is a starting point for understanding which foods are high in sodium. Sodium is a mineral found naturally in some foods and added to packaged items to preserve freshness and enhance flavor.

Too much sodium can be harmful to your health, especially if you are salt sensitive. However, too little sodium can be harmful to health and performance if you lose a lot of sodium through multiple hours of activity, extreme environments, or sweat.

Sodium is important to maintain fluid balance, control blood pressure, and for muscles and nerves to work properly.

For average Americans, 2,300 mg of sodium per day<sup>1</sup> is appropriate; this is about the amount found in one teaspoon of table salt. Sodium needs vary depending on medical condition, activity, and environment. The most active warriors who operate in extreme conditions may require as much as 3,500mg (women) or 5,000 mg (men) of sodium per day.<sup>2</sup> Restaurant food often contains more salt. At home and in military dining facilities, the amounts of sodium vary greatly. Increased portion sizes also increase sodium intake. For help estimating your sodium needs, visit HPRC's website and read [hprc-online.org/nutrition/go-for-green/go-for-green-r-for-the-warfighter](http://hprc-online.org/nutrition/go-for-green/go-for-green-r-for-the-warfighter).

Use along with the Food and Beverages (Green, Yellow, Red) Guide to help choose appropriate foods and beverages for your sodium needs.	<b>Low Sodium</b>  <b>LOW</b>	<b>Moderate Sodium</b>  <b>MODERATE</b>	<b>High Sodium</b>  <b>HIGH</b>
<b>Foods and Beverages</b>	Fruit—fresh or frozen Vegetables—fresh or frozen No-added-salt/salt-free canned vegetable and tomato products Grains—plain, unseasoned Grain products—plain, unseasoned pasta, rice, quinoa, couscous Unsalted nuts, seeds Unsalted nut butters (peanut, almond, soynut) Fresh chicken, turkey, beef, pork Milk Most yogurts Olive oil, canola oil Dry beans, peas, lentils	Some breads, rolls, biscuits, pancakes, waffles, English muffins Low-sodium canned vegetables Most snack foods (pretzels, crackers, chips, popcorn) Most sauces/glazes on chicken, turkey, beef, or pork Most homemade soups made with low-sodium broth Most frozen meal “starters” Packaged rice/grain dishes, if you use only half the seasoning packet	Canned vegetables and beans Canned tomato products Instant noodles with flavor packet Deli meats/cold cuts—turkey, ham, bologna, salami, etc. Processed meats—sausage, bacon, pepperoni, hot dogs Cheese Condiments and toppings—soy sauce, ketchup, marinades, cocktail sauce, gravy, nacho cheese dip, pickles Seasoned salts, table salt Canned soups Almost all “fast foods” Frozen entrees/“microwave dinners”
<b>When to Eat</b>	Eat low-sodium foods most often, especially if you have been told to follow a “low-sodium diet.” Not all low-sodium foods are also labeled Green; limit Yellow- and Red-labeled foods and beverages for overall good health.	Eat moderate-sodium foods sometimes. Moderate-sodium foods are appropriate for most warriors who are moderately active	Eat high-sodium foods rarely or in small amounts. For warriors who are active multiple hours per day and/or in extreme environments, some high-sodium foods should be included daily.
<b>General Tips</b>	Choose mostly whole, fresh foods. Cooking at home can help reduce sodium content. Purchase unflavored foods, and add your own fresh seasonings: herbs, spices, vinegars, citrus. When cooking with whole, fresh foods that are naturally very low in sodium, it’s okay to add a pinch of salt.	Although snack foods and breads have moderate sodium, large portions can increase your sodium intake to high. Drain and rinse canned foods (beans, tuna) to reduce their sodium content. Even low- and reduced-sodium versions of your favorite chips or crackers may fall into the moderate sodium category.	Table salt is mostly sodium; use sparingly. Processed, packaged, and convenience foods contribute about 80% of sodium to our diets; read food labels and pay attention to serving sizes. Many condiments and toppings are high in sodium. Restaurant foods are generally higher in sodium than homemade foods.

<sup>1</sup> Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010

<sup>2</sup> Military Dietary Reference Intake