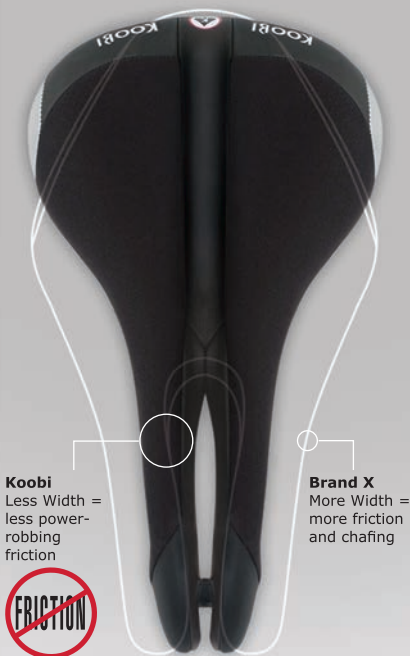


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» MED TENT «

GET SERIOUS ABOUT SODIUM

BY JORDAN D. METZL, M.D.

As we head into months of hotter weather, it's especially important for triathletes to pay special attention to individual sodium levels when training and racing. The key is to figure out your distinct sweat rate (read on) and replenish your salt stores appropriately. It's much easier to stay ahead of salt loss rather than try to play catch-up during a race or long workout. Here are five tips for keeping your sodium levels in check:

- 1 Be sure to include salt in your diet before competition in all distances to maintain blood sodium levels. Serious salt loss leads to low-sodium levels called hyponatremia. Symptoms range from muscle cramping and swelling of fingers and toes to headache and disorientation. Extreme cases can be life-threatening.
- 2 Take a minimum of 600-1,000 mg of sodium per hour if you're female and 800-1200 mg of sodium per hour if you're male. Aim for the high end of these ranges for longer events.



- 3 Determine if you are a "salty sweater." Weigh yourself nude, then go for a 1-hour run without taking in any fluids, then weigh yourself post-run. The difference will tell you how much your body sweats out each hour. "Salty sweater" indicators include salt rings on your clothing; fine, white salt dusting on your body post-workout; and more frequent muscle cramping. If you have a high sweat and/or sodium loss, preload in the days before competition and test higher amounts of sodium intake during training and competition.
- 4 Practice your fluid and sodium intake amounts in training and adjust for weather conditions.
- 5 Regardless of your individual rates of sweat and sodium loss, eat salty meals prior to racing in hot-weather events.

Good salt replenishment options

FOOD OR BEVERAGE ITEM	SERVING SIZE	SODIUM (MG)
PRE-/POST-COMPETITION AND TRAINING:		
Chicken noodle soup	1 cup	1107
Baked beans (can)	1 cup	1008
Dill pickle	1 medium	928
Tomato juice	1 cup	882
Salted pretzels	1 ounce	482
TRAINING AND COMPETITION:		
Water	1 cup	7
Gatorade	1 cup	110
PowerBar	1	200
PowerBar Energy Gel	1	200
Salt pill	1	80-225

Jordan D. Metz, M.D. is a sports medicine specialist at Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City who has done 29 marathons and nine Ironmans. His new book is *The Athlete's Book of Home Remedies*. *LifeSport* coach Paul Regensburg contributed to this article.