
Kidney Disease and Potassium

What is potassium?

Potassium is a mineral found in food. Your muscles and nerves need potassium to work well. Your heart muscle needs potassium for a strong beat.

Your kidneys filter extra potassium into your urine. When you have kidney disease, the filters do not work well and potassium builds up in your body.

A high amount of potassium can make your heart beat irregular. Too much potassium can cause your heart to stop beating.

What is the safe amount of potassium in my blood?

A safe or normal level is 3.5 to 5.0 mmols.

How can I keep my potassium level from getting too high?

You need to limit foods that are high in potassium.

What foods are high in potassium?

All fruit, vegetables and their juices contain potassium. Some have more potassium than others. Milk and milk products such as yogurt, pudding, ice cream and buttermilk are also high in potassium.

What should I know when making choices?

The amount or portion of the food you eat is important. A low potassium food can become a high potassium food if you eat a large amount.

For example, strawberries are a lower potassium choice (1/2 cup or 125 ml). However, if you eat a larger amount they become a high potassium choice.

Will I be able to eat potatoes?

Potatoes are very high in potassium. Peeling, cutting and soaking potatoes in water overnight leaches out some of the potassium. Boil the potatoes in fresh water the next day.

You can double boil the potatoes to lower potassium. First peel and cut the potatoes in small pieces. Boil them in water until half cooked. Change the water, boil until cooked and throw the water out.

Less often choose baked potatoes, french fries and potatoes cooked in a microwave because all of the potassium stays inside the potatoes.

Other than potatoes, what else can I eat?

You can eat white rice and white pasta since they have very little potassium.

Can I have salt substitutes?

No. Salt substitutes such as No Salt™ are made with potassium.

What if I cannot lower potassium through diet alone?

Your health care provider may prescribe a medication called Kayexalate. This medication helps remove potassium. It binds to potassium in your stomach and excretes it in your bowel movements.

How do I know how much potassium I should eat?

The amount of potassium you need depends on:

- how much potassium you eat now
- the amount of potassium in your blood as measured by blood tests
- if you are taking medication that affects potassium such as water pills (diuretics) and some blood pressure medication
- how well your kidneys work
- if you make some urine or not
- if you are on dialysis treatments

What about foods that have potassium additives?

Some foods have potassium additives. These additives can contribute a significant amount of potassium to your diet. They are listed on the food label and are called:

- potassium chloride
- potassium sorbate or
- potassium lactate

Many companies use potassium chloride in place of sodium chloride when making sodium reduced products. It is important that you learn how to read labels. Your dietitian can help you do this.

Potassium Food Lists

There are 2 food lists in this handout:

1. Low and Medium Potassium Foods
2. High Potassium Foods

Follow these guidelines when using these lists:

- 1 serving = $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 ml) or 1 small piece of fruit unless something else is written.
- Choose 3 fruit servings and 3 vegetable servings a day from the Low to Medium Potassium Food list.
- Your dietitian can help you add some choices from the High Potassium Food list.

Foods not on the lists:

- Milk, yogurt, ice cream, pudding, soy milk and cream soups are high in potassium. Choose only 1 item a day.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 ml) milk has the same amount of potassium as 1 fruit **or** 1 vegetable serving from the Low to Medium Potassium Food list.
- Chocolate and nuts are high in potassium.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 ml) of soup made from allowed vegetables counts as 1 vegetable serving.

Remember

- **For questions contact a dietitian at 905-522-1155 ext. 33604.**
- **You may have to leave a message and a dietitian will call you back.**

Low to Medium Potassium Foods

| Fruit and Juice | Vegetables |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| apricot – 2 small | alfalfa sprouts – 1 cup (240 ml) |
| apricot nectar | asparagus – 4 spears |
| apple | bamboo shoots |
| apple juice | beans: green, wax |
| applesauce | beets |
| berries: black, blue, goose, raspberries, strawberries | broccoli |
| cherries | bean sprouts |
| clementine | cabbage |
| cranberries - 2 cups (480 ml) | cauliflower |
| fig – 1 medium raw | carrots |
| fruit cocktail | celery – 1 stalk |
| grapefruit – ½ | corn – or ½ ear |
| grapes | cucumber |
| grape juice | eggplant |
| lemon juice | endive |
| lime juice | escarole |
| mandarin orange | kale |
| nectarine ½ | leeks |
| papaya nectar | lettuce |
| passion fruit | mixed vegetables |
| peach | mushrooms, fresh |
| pear- ½ | okra |
| pear nectar | onions |
| pineapple | peas, snow peas |
| pineapple juice | pepper: red or green |
| prunes - 2 | potato: mashed or boiled |
| prune juice – ¼ cup (125 ml) | radish |
| plum | spinach, raw |
| raisins – 2 tablespoons (15 ml) | summer squash – spaghetti, zucchini |
| rhubarb | tomato – ½ medium |
| tangerine | tomato sauce, canned ¼ cup (125 ml) |
| watermelon | turnip |
| Other: fruit pie: 1/8 piece using any of above fruit | water chestnuts |
| | watercress |

High Potassium Foods

| Fruit and Juices | Vegetables |
|---------------------|--|
| avocado | artichokes |
| banana | beet greens |
| cantaloupe | brussel sprouts |
| dates – 3 | bok choy |
| grapefruit juice | beans, dried |
| guava | carrot juice |
| kiwi | collards |
| mango | dandelion greens |
| melon - honeydew | lentils, legumes |
| orange | lima beans |
| orange juice | mushrooms – canned, cooked |
| papaya | parsnips |
| passion fruit juice | peas - dried |
| persimmon | plantain |
| pomegranate | potato – baked, instant, fries, scalloped |
| | pumpkin |
| | rapini |
| | rutabagas |
| | spinach, cooked |
| | squash (winter) – acorn, butternut, hubbard, |
| | sweet potato |
| | swiss chard |
| | tomato juice, vegetable juice |
| | yam |