
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 your kidneys slow down, only some of the filters work. Potassium builds up in your body.

How does the build up of potassium affect me?

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

What is the safe amount of potassium in my blood?

A safe or normal level is 3.5 to 5.0 mmols. A potassium level over 6.0 is not safe.

How will I feel if my potassium level is getting too high?

You may not have any warning signs. Some people feel weak in the legs or a feeling of rubber legs.

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.

The number of choices is important too. You get more potassium if you increase the number of choices you eat.

Will I be able to eat potatoes?

Potatoes are very high in potassium. Avoid baked potatoes or potatoes cooked in a microwave because all of the potassium stays inside the potatoes. Avoid scalloped and instant mashed potatoes as well as French fries.

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 cut the potatoes in small pieces. Boil them in water until half cooked. Change the water, boil until cooked, then throw the water out.

Potatoes fill me up. What else can I eat?

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

Can I have salt substitutes?

No, salt substitutes are made with potassium.

Can I take any medication to lower potassium?

A medication called Kayexalate may be prescribed to remove potassium. Most people prefer to control the amount of potassium in their diet since Kayexalate tastes bad.

What if I am on water pill medication?

Some water pill medications may remove potassium from your body. If this happens, you will be asked to increase potassium in your diet.

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 potassium level in your blood
- if you are taking medication that affects potassium
- how well your kidneys work
- if you make some urine or not
- if you are on dialysis treatments

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 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 list.
- Your dietitian can help you work in some choices from the high 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 milk has the same amount of potassium as one fruit or vegetable choice from the low to medium list.
- Chocolates and nuts are high in potassium.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of soup made from allowed vegetables counts as a vegetable serving.

For questions contact the renal dietitians 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
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	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	radish
plum	spinach, raw
raisins - 2 tablespoons	summer squash (raw) - zucchini, crookneck, spaghetti
rhubarb	tomato – ½ medium
tangerine	tomato sauce, canned ¼ cup
watermelon	turnip
Other: fruit pie: 1/8 piece using any of the above fruit	water chestnuts
	watercress
	Other: vegetable soup

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