

Healthy eating when you have high potassium levels

This resource is for people with kidney disease who have **high potassium levels**.

Potassium is a mineral found in food. It is needed for your heart, nerves, and muscles to work properly. Blood tests will check your levels. High levels can be **very dangerous** and may stop your heart from beating.

Why is my potassium high?

When your kidneys are not working properly, potassium may build up in your blood. You may not feel any symptoms with high levels. Research now shows that the potassium you eat doesn't change your blood levels by very much at all. We suggest you speak to your doctor about other possible causes before changing your diet.

Most common causes of high potassium include:



Constipation

Opening your bowels at least once a day helps remove potassium from your body. Eating a high fibre diet can reduce potassium.



High blood glucose levels

Talk to your doctor and dietitian about how diabetes medication and diet can lower potassium.



Some medications, herbal, and vitamin supplements

Discuss with your doctor, pharmacist, or dietitian.



Missing dialysis or not enough dialysis time

Appropriate dialysis treatment helps remove potassium from your body.



High acid levels in blood

Too much acid in your blood can increase potassium. This can be improved with medication or dialysis and eating a more plant-based diet.



Muscle breakdown and rapid weight loss

Potassium is stored in your muscles and can leak out into the blood if your muscles are damaged.



Exercising before a blood test

Exercise can temporarily increase blood potassium - it's best to schedule your blood test **before** any exercise in the day.

What about potassium in my diet?

If your doctor or dietitian can't find any other causes for your high potassium level, you may need to change the types and amounts of some foods you are eating. Your dietitian can discuss strategies to suit your individual needs.

Tips to lower potassium intake:



Potassium chloride can be used in place of salt in some packaged and 'salt-reduced' foods – eat less **processed foods**.



If you have large portions of **meat** or large sized **milk** drinks, try reducing these. This includes iced coffee and flavoured milk drinks.



Snack foods such as chocolate, chips, pies, sausage rolls are high in potassium and low in fibre. Swap for higher fibre snacks.



Drink mostly water
Reduce alcoholic drinks, coffees, milkshakes, fruit and vegetable juices.

You do not need to limit all foods containing potassium, especially healthy foods. Fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, nuts, and seeds contain potassium. However, as not all of the potassium is digested and absorbed by the body, these foods often don't need to be restricted unless consumed in excess. Whereas almost 100% of potassium from additives and animal foods ends up in the blood.

What should I change in my diet to reduce potassium levels?

1. Aim for a healthy dietary pattern and portion sizes

- New research shows a balanced diet, from all food groups, helps potassium levels.
- Be mindful of portions – even if you eat healthily, too much of some foods can upset potassium balance. Check below to make sure you are not eating too much.
- Plant-based eating lowers acid levels in the blood and helps keep your bowels regular to remove potassium from your body.



Image: Canada's Food Guide (Government of Canada) copied from version available at: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>







This is a consensus document from Dietitian/ Nutritionists from the Nutrition Education Materials Online, "NEMO", team.

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Food group	Recommended amounts each day
Fruit 	2 serves (1 serve = 1 apple or orange, 1 small banana, 2 plums, 1 cup of diced/canned fruit or berries/grapes, ½ cup juice, 30g dried fruit, 3 prunes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High fibre whole fruits help the body control potassium – include every day! • Note that serves of juices, smoothies and dried fruit are smaller as they are more concentrated in potassium • Aim for a variety of colours and different types of fruit over the week
Vegetables 	5 serves (1 serve = ½ cup cooked potato/sweet potato/taro, ½ cup cooked green/orange vegetables, 1 cup green leafy/salad, 1 medium tomato) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High fibre vegetables help the body control potassium – include every day! • Peel, chop, and boil in water to leach out some potassium • Be sure to only have one serve of potato or other root vegetables • Avoid juices, tomato paste and soups as they are concentrated in potassium • Aim for a variety of colours and different types of vegetables over the week
Grain foods 	3-6 serves (1 serve = ½ cup cooked rice/pasta, 1 slice bread, 2/3 cup cereal) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose multigrain, wholegrain, and high fibre varieties e.g. oats, Weet-Bix, All Bran, barley, brown rice, wholemeal pasta, grainy bread • A small portion with each meal helps your body process potassium
Meat and alternatives 	Speak to a dietitian about the right number of servings for you (1 serve = 100g raw meat/chicken (the size of a deck of cards), 120g raw fish/small tin, 2 eggs, 1 cup legumes/beans e.g. lentils/chickpeas/bean mix, 170g tofu, 30g nuts/seeds) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure to avoid large meat servings • Eat less processed meats and red meats • Mainly have chicken, fish, and eggs • Eat more plant-based choices like tofu, legumes/beans, unsalted nuts, and seeds to help the body control potassium
Dairy 	2 serves (1 serve = 250mL milk, 200g yoghurt, 2 slices cheese) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid large servings of cow's, soy, and coconut milk, including milk-based coffees and iced coffees • Consider changing to lower potassium plant-based milks e.g. oat, rice, almond milk (check ingredients list for potassium additives and aim for calcium fortified)
Drinks 	Daily amount depends on thirst, activity, and if you have a fluid restriction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure to drink enough water to help your bowels (be mindful if you have a fluid restriction) • Avoid large servings of milk, including milk-based coffees and flavoured milk • If you enjoy coffee, keep your daily intake to 2-3 small cups, consider having it black or with a plant-based milk, or swap to more tea • Limit your intake of juices and smoothies • Avoid coconut milk, coconut cream and coconut water • Limit your intake of beer, wine, and ciders

2. Avoid potassium additives

Processed and packaged foods contain hidden potassium additives that are easily absorbed. Check the ingredients list for code numbers e.g. potassium sorbate 202, potassium chloride 508, potassium phosphate 340.

To reduce additives, avoid processed foods and cook from fresh ingredients. Limit:














- Salt substitutes e.g. Diet Rite Lite Salt, Heart Salt – use herbs and spices instead
- Some 'salt-reduced' foods – potassium chloride can be used in place of salt in some packaged foods so check the ingredients list
- Takeaway and ready meals, chicken nuggets, pies and sausage rolls, crumbed frozen foods
- Deli meats, ham, bacon, corned beef, and sausages
- Meal bases and sauces
- Processed cheeses
- Some herbal and vitamin supplements

3. Cooking and food preparation methods

- Cooking vegetables and meat in water can reduce potassium content. Try using water in the microwave or stove, pressure cooker, pot roast, and parboiling before roasting.
- Peeling where possible e.g. potato, sweet potato.
- Cutting into smaller pieces, grating, or shredding - greater surface area allows more potassium to leach out of the food during cooking.

4. Swap for lower potassium choices

- Eat less processed foods, takeaways, and snack foods and swap for fresh, high fibre foods.
- Swap large portions of meat and milk products for smaller portions.
- Swap coffee, milkshakes, juices, and alcoholic drinks to mainly water or tea.
- Aim for 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables per day. Check you are not having too much fruit. Be mindful of concentrated forms e.g. soups, juices, dried fruit, and swap to fresh options.
- Have only one serve of potato or other root vegetables (boiled) - swap to more of the other types of vegetables and salads instead.

Higher potassium	Lower potassium
Processed foods and takeaways - avoid	
	
Meat and alternatives – small portion (size of deck of cards)	
	
Snack foods – swap to healthy high fibre choices	
	
Drinks – be guided by your health care team if you have a fluid restriction	
	
Vegetables - aim for 5 servings per day	
	 
Fruit – aim for 2 servings per day (fresh)	
	

What about exercise?

Regular exercise can assist with potassium levels – aim for 30 minutes most days of the week. Exercise helps your bowels remove potassium from the body and assists your muscles to use potassium.



Things I can do to reduce my potassium levels:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist: _____