

Lowering your potassium levels



Working together for better patient information

What is this leaflet about?

Potassium is a mineral that can build up in your body if your kidneys are not working properly. Some medicines can also increase your potassium levels. This information is aimed at people who have been advised to lower the potassium in their diet by their healthcare team. It gives some initial advice to help lower high potassium levels.

Only follow this advice if you have been advised by your healthcare team to lower your potassium levels.





Why do I need to lower my potassium levels?

When potassium is absorbed into the blood, it helps to keep your muscles and heart working properly.

Your kidneys help to control the amount of potassium in your blood. Both low and high levels of potassium in the blood can lead to heart problems. Only follow this guidance if your healthcare team has advised you to.

How can I lower my potassium levels?

Medications

Always take any medications you have been prescribed to control the levels of potassium in your body.

Healthy bowels

Regular bowel movements can help prevent potassium from building up in the blood. **If you are struggling with constipation, you may benefit from eating more fibre.** Fibre is found in fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, beans, pulses, lentils, nuts and seeds. Your dietitian may also recommend a fibre supplement.

If you are still constipated, your healthcare team may prescribe some laxatives.

Blood sugar control (if you have diabetes)

High blood sugar levels are linked with high potassium levels.

Talk to your dietitian or diabetes team for help with managing your blood sugar levels.

Dietary changes

Potassium is found in many foods and drinks, including processed foods such as fruit juice, crisps, chocolate and foods containing potassium additives. **You may not need to limit all high-potassium foods,** but you may need to reduce your portion sizes, or how often you eat them.

A well-balanced diet contains a variety of foods from different food groups to make sure you get all the nutrients you need to stay as healthy as possible. It can be harder to get a good balance when you have been advised to limit the amount of some foods you eat.

You may also find it difficult to follow this leaflet's advice if you are already following a special diet for another reason, such as religious or ethical beliefs, or due to a medical condition.

A dietitian can give you personalised advice to help ensure you still get the healthy nutrients while managing your potassium intake.



What changes can I make to the food I eat to lower potassium?

Avoid potassium chloride as a salt replacement

Potassium chloride is sometimes used to replace some, or all, of the salt in a product, but it can increase your potassium levels.

Avoid any salt substitutes which list potassium chloride on the ingredients list, including SoLo®, Lo-Salt® or sodium-free salt.

Check processed foods such as crisps for potassium chloride on the ingredients list. You may be able to find a similar product which does not contain added potassium.

Processed foods are also often high in salt. Wherever possible, limit your intake of processed food and cook from scratch.

For seasoning, try pepper, fresh or dried herbs, spices, lemon juice, chilli or garlic.

Cooking methods

Boiling potatoes and other vegetables reduces their potassium content as some of the potassium leaks into the cooking water. Potatoes that have been par-boiled (partly cooked by boiling) can then be fried, roasted or added to casseroles.

Avoid using cooking water to make gravy, stocks or soups to keep out the extra potassium.

Soak dried pulses (beans, lentils, chickpeas) in plenty of water overnight, discard the water and boil. Alternatively, use tinned pulses, drain and rinse before adding to dishes.

Unless vegetables have been boiled, avoid steaming or microwaving as this keeps more of the potassium inside.

These simple steps can make a real difference lowering potassium in your diet.

Choose low potassium food options

Aim to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day

Food group	Lower potassium choices	High potassium foods to reduce
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apples • pears • small citrus fruits like satsumas and clementines • grapes • drained tinned fruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bananas • avocado • rhubarb • dried fruit such as raisins, sultanas, currants, dates or dried apricots
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrots • broccoli • runner beans • peas • cabbage • aubergine • bean sprouts • green salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beetroot • tomato purée • sundried tomatoes • dried and fresh mushrooms • baby spinach • artichoke • chard • pak choi • okra
Dairy and milk <i>Limit milk and yoghurt to a total of ½ pint (300ml) per day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dairy products such as cow's milk and cow's milk yoghurt • cheese • crème fraîche • cream • rice, almond or oat milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • condensed milk • evaporated milk • milk powders
Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meat (chicken, turkey, pork, beef) • fish including canned tuna • eggs • tinned or soaked and boiled beans and pulses such as kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils and soya beans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ham and other deli meats • processed meats such as Spam®



Food group	Lower potassium choices	High potassium foods to reduce
<p>Starchy foods</p> <p><i>Limit potato or starchy vegetables to maximum one portion (150g) per day</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boiled potatoes or potatoes which have been par-boiled before roasting or frying • boiled starchy vegetables such as cassava, yam, plantain, taro or sweet potato • pasta • rice • noodles • couscous • bread • breakfast cereals such as wheat biscuits, porridge (oats), shredded wheat or rice or corn-based cereals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jacket or baked potatoes • oven, microwave or shop-bought chips • manufactured potato products such as hash browns, potato waffles, frozen roast potatoes or potato wedges • starchy vegetables such as cassava, yam, plantain, taro or sweet potato that have not been boiled • breakfast cereals containing lots of dried fruit, nuts or chocolate, such as muesli or granola
<p>Snacks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corn, rice, wheat or maize-based snacks • popcorn • boiled or jelly sweets • marshmallows • mints • plain biscuits such as rich tea, digestives, shortbread, custard creams • plain cakes such as sponge cake, madeira cake, angel cake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • potato, vegetable or lentil-based crisps and snacks • chocolate • fudge • nuts • dried fruit • biscuits and cakes containing lots of dried fruit, nuts or chocolate
<p>Drinks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tea • herbal tea • squash • cordial • water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coffee (<i>limit to one cup a day</i>) • malted milk drinks such as Ovaltine® or Horlicks® • hot chocolate • fruit and vegetable juices • smoothies • wine (<i>limit to one small glass of white wine</i>) • beer • cider

Where can I find more information?



Please speak to your kidney dietitian for individual dietary advice, and for information about your specific dietary requirements.

- NHS Choices - Live Well: www.nhs.uk/live-well
- Kidney Kitchen from Kidney Care UK: www.kidneykitchen.org
Healthy, delicious multicultural food for every stage of kidney disease.
Approved by kidney dietitians and enjoyed by everyone!






FREE
kidney-friendly
recipes



Contact us



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Publication date 04/2024
Review date 04/2027

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