



Lowering your potassium levels

Patient Information



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This leaflet is aimed at people who have been advised to follow a low potassium diet by their healthcare team. It gives some initial advice to help reduce the amount of potassium in your diet.

Only follow this advice if you have been advised that you need to lower your potassium.

A dietitian can help you plan your diet so you are getting the right amount of potassium. Try to follow the advice in this leaflet until you see the dietitian, who may then give you different advice to suit your specific situation.



Why do you need to follow a low potassium diet?

Potassium is a mineral found in many foods and drinks. When it's 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. Too much potassium can be dangerous as it can cause an irregular heart beat.



How can I reduce my potassium level?

Limiting the amount of potassium in your diet is one way to help reduce the amount of potassium in your blood. Potassium is found in foods and drinks, including potatoes, fruits, vegetables, milk and some snack foods. You may not need to limit all high potassium foods but you will probably 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 keep 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 that you eat.

You may also find it difficult to follow the advice in this leaflet if you are already following a special diet for another reason. A dietitian can help you make alterations to your diet to improve your potassium level, whilst also help you to continue enjoying a balanced diet.



How can I follow a low potassium diet?

Cooking methods

Boiling potatoes and vegetables will reduce 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 if desired.

Try not to use cooking water to make gravy, stocks or soups and try not to steam or microwave vegetables.

These simple steps can make a real difference to reduce the potassium in your diet.



Food group	High potassium foods to limit:	Lower potassium choices:
Fruit	Bananas, avocado, oranges, currants, dried fruit (raisins, sultanas, dates, dried apricots).	Fruits should be limited to a maximum of 2 portions per day. A portion is about 80g or a handful. Good choices would be 1 small apple or pear, 1 satsuma, 10 grapes or a small bowl of drained tinned fruit in syrup.
Vegetables	Beetroot, tomato puree, sundried tomatoes, dried and fresh mushrooms, spinach. Beans and pulses e.g. kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, soya beans are high in potassium but can be used instead of meat or if you are vegetarian.	Boiled vegetables should be limited to a maximum of 3 small portions (80g) per day. A small bowl of salad (80g) could be included as one of these portions. Good choices would be carrots, broccoli, runner beans, peas, cabbage, aubergine, bean sprouts.
Starchy Foods	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. Fried cassava, yam or sweet potato. Taro, plantain and parsnip. Breakfast cereals containing lots of dried fruit, nuts or chocolate for example, muesli, granola, fruit and fibre Bran based breakfast cereals for example All Bran®, Bran Flakes®.	Boiled potatoes or potatoes which have been par-boiled before roasting or frying. Boiled cassava, yam or sweet potato. Limit potato or starchy vegetables to maximum 1 portion (150g) per day. Pasta, rice, noodles, couscous, and breads – these are all much lower in potassium than potato. Try to include instead of potato on some days. Suitable breakfast cereals include rice or corn based cereals, wheat biscuits, Shredded Wheat®, Special K®.

Snacks	Potato crisps, chocolate, fudge, nuts. Biscuits and cakes containing lots of dried fruit, nuts or chocolate.	Corn, rice, wheat or maize based snacks, popcorn, boiled or jelly sweets, marshmallows, mints. Plain biscuits and cakes such as rich tea, digestives, shortbread, custard creams, sponge cake, madeira cake, angel cake.
Drinks	Coffee (limit to 1 cup a day), malted milk drinks for example Ovaltine® or Horlicks®, hot chocolate, fruit and vegetable juices, smoothies, wine (limit to 1 small glass white wine), beer, cider.	Tea, herbal tea, squash or cordial, water, fizzy drinks Spirits are lower in potassium than other alcoholic drinks.
Milk and Dairy Products	Limit milk to 1/2 pint per day (300ml). Limit yoghurt to 3 small pots per week. Condensed milk, evaporated milk and milk powders.	Cheese, crème fraiche or cream. Rice or oat milk.
Salt Substitutes	Lo-Salt, So-Low, reduced sodium salt.	Pepper, fresh or dried herbs, spices, chilli, garlic.

What else can I do?

You may need to do more than just alter your diet to keep your potassium levels low. Your healthcare team will check to see if there might be other reasons that your potassium is raised. Constipation, poor blood glucose (sugar) control and certain medications can all affect your potassium levels. Ask your doctor for more information about this.


Where can I find out more information?

- NHS Choices: Living with Kidney Disease - www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Kidney-disease-chronic
- NHS Choices: Live Well - www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx
- National Kidney Federation: Potassium - www.kidney.org.uk/help-and-info/medical-information-from-the-nkf-/medical-info-factsheets-potassium/#needdiet
- Renal Association Patient Information Leaflets – includes leaflets on *Managing your fluid and salt levels* and a *Healthy diet and lifestyle for your kidneys* – www.renal.org/information-resources/patient-leaflets



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