

Low Potassium Diet information – 3 pages

What is potassium? — Potassium is a mineral found in most foods. The body needs potassium to work normally. It keeps the heart beating and helps the nerves and muscles work. But people need only a certain amount of potassium. Too much or too little potassium in the body can cause problems.

Having too much potassium in the blood is called “hyperkalemia.” This can cause heart rhythm problems and muscle weakness.

Who might need to be on a low-potassium diet? — People usually need to be on a low-potassium diet to treat or prevent hyperkalemia.

The most common causes of hyperkalemia are:

- Certain medicines – Some medicines, including certain ones for high blood pressure and heart problems, might raise the level of potassium in the body.
- Kidney disease – Normally, the kidneys filter the blood and remove excess salt and water through urination (figure 1). They keep the level of potassium in the blood normal. When the kidneys don’t work well or stop working, they can’t get rid of the potassium in the urine. Then, too much potassium builds up in the blood.

Many people who get a treatment called “dialysis” for kidney disease need to be on a low-potassium diet. Dialysis is a treatment that takes over the job of the kidneys.

What does eating a low-potassium diet involve? — Almost all foods have potassium. So the key is to:

- Avoid or eat only small amounts of foods with high levels of potassium (table 1, attached)
- Choose foods with low levels of potassium (table 2, attached)

Your doctor may recommend that you work with a dietitian to help plan your meals. He or she will tell you how much potassium you should eat each day.

If you are on a low potassium diet, you should eat 2 grams of potassium per day or less. To figure out how much potassium is in processed foods, you will need to look at the food’s nutrition label (figure 2). You will need to look at the:

- “Potassium” number – This tells you how much potassium is in 1 serving of the food. If you eat 1 serving, then you are eating this amount of potassium.
- “Serving size” – This tells you how big a serving is. If you eat 2 servings, then you are eating 2 times the amount of potassium listed.

What are other ways to cut down on potassium? — Here are some other ways to cut down on potassium:

- Drain the liquid from canned fruits, vegetables, or meats before eating.
- If you eat foods that have a lot of potassium, eat only small portions.
- Reduce the amount of potassium in the vegetables you eat. You can do this for both frozen and raw vegetables. (If the vegetables are raw, peel and cut them up first.) To reduce the amount of potassium, soak the vegetables in warm unsalted water for at least 2 hours. Then drain the water and rinse the vegetables in warm water. If you cook the vegetables, cook them in unsalted water.

Table 1: High Potassium Foods

Fruits	Vegetables	Proteins	Other
Avocado	Artichokes	Black beans	Chocolate
Bananas	Baked beans	Clams	Dairy products
Coconut	Beets	Ground beef	Granola
Cantaloupe and honeydew melons	Broccoli	Kidney beans	Milk
Dates	Brussels sprouts	Lobster	Peanut butter
Dried fruits	Cabbage (raw)	Navy beans	Soups that are salt-free or low-sodium
Figs	Carrots (raw)	Pinto beans	Soy milk
Kiwi	Chard	Salmon	Sports drinks
Mango	Olives	Sardines	Tomato sauce
Nectarines	Potatoes (white and sweet)	Scallops	Wheat bran and bran products
Oranges and orange juice	Pickles	Steak	Whole-grain bread
Prunes and prune juice	Pumpkin	Whitefish	Yogurt
Raisins	Rutabaga		
	Squash (acorn, butternut, hubbard)		
	Tomatoes and tomato juice		

Table 2: Low Potassium Foods

Fruits	Vegetables	Proteins
Apple juice	Alfalfa sprouts	Almonds
Apples and applesauce	Asparagus	Cashews
Blackberries	Cabbage (cooked)	Chicken
Blueberries	Carrots (cooked)	Eggs
Cherries	Cauliflower	Flax seed
Cranberries	Celery	Peanuts
Grapefruit	Corn	Pumpkin seeds
Grapes and grape juice	Cucumber	Shrimp
Peaches	Eggplant	Sunflower seeds
Pears	Green beans	Tuna
Pineapple	Green peas	Turkey
Plums	Green peppers	Walnuts
Raspberries	Kale	
Strawberries	Lettuce	
Watermelon	Okra	
	Onions	
	Radish	
	Rhubarb	
	Spinach	
	Water chestnuts	
	Wax beans	
	Yellow squash	
	Zucchini	