



Lowering your potassium intake

This leaflet is for patients with kidney disease and explains why it is important to lower the potassium levels in your food.

What is potassium?

Potassium is a mineral found naturally in many foods. Some potassium is needed as part of a healthy diet. Potassium plays a role in keeping your heartbeat regular and keeping your muscles working normally.

Why do I need to control the amount of potassium in my blood?

If your blood potassium level is very high, this may be dangerous. This is because potassium affects your heart rhythm and could cause a heart attack.

Why is the amount of potassium in my blood too high?

The level of potassium in your blood is usually controlled by the kidneys. When your kidneys are not working properly, the potassium level in your blood may rise. High potassium foods will make this worse but there can also be medical reasons that cause a higher blood potassium level, e.g. some blood pressure tablets or your blood becoming too acidic (known as 'acidosis').

How do I follow a low potassium diet?

On the next few pages, we have listed foods that need to be limited or avoided because they are high in potassium. And we have also listed lower potassium alternatives. Your dietitian can give you individualised advice on the changes you may need to make.

Does meat contain potassium?

Some protein foods, such as poultry, red meat and fish are higher in potassium than vegetarian sources of protein such as chickpeas, lentils and most tinned beans. Keep meat and fish portions quite small and try to have more vegetarian meals.

Further information

National Kidney Federation www.kidney.org.uk

Kidney Research UK www.kidneyresearchuk.org

Kidney Patient Guide www.kidneypatientguide.org.uk

Contacting us

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HIGH POTASSIUM FOODS – LIMIT / AVOID ✕

Fruit	Avocados, coconut, bananas, blackcurrants, kiwi fruit, apricots. Dried fruit e.g. raisins, sultanas, currants, dates, dried apricots, prunes.
Vegetables	Fresh beetroot, spinach, mushrooms, okra, parsnips, artichokes, fennel, Brussels sprouts, endives, pak choi, chard, raddiccio, cherry tomatoes, sundried tomatoes, tomato puree, raw celery, raw red or green cabbage, baked butternut squash, fried courgettes, plantains.
Starchy foods	Jacket potatoes, roast potatoes (unless par-boiled), chips or fries, processed potato products e.g. potato waffles, hash browns or instant mash. Sweet potatoes, yam, cassava or taro if not boiled. Breads/cereals containing nuts, seeds, dried fruit or chocolate or high in bran.
Dairy	Limit milk to no more than ½ pint (300ml) per day. If you wish to have other milk products such as yoghurts or milk puddings, reduce the amount of milk you use accordingly.
Snacks	Potato-based snacks, e.g. crisps. Chocolate – all types. Nuts and seeds, dried fruit. Cakes/biscuits/cereal bars containing nuts, seeds, dried fruit or chocolate. Twiglets, liquorice, snacks made from gram flour, e.g. Bombay mix.
Drinks	Coffee (especially filter coffee), drinking chocolate/cocoa. Malted drinks e.g. Horlicks, Ovaltine. Fruit juices, vegetable juices, smoothies. Beers: lagers, ales, stout; cider, all types of wine and fortified wine.
Other	Tomato ketchup, brown sauce. Peanut butter, chocolate spread, black treacle. Bovril, Marmite, Vegemite. Do not use reduced sodium salts such as 'Lo-Salt' or 'Saxa So Low' as they have added potassium.

LOW POTASSIUM – CHOOSE THESE ✓

Fruit	Apples, pears, small oranges, peaches, nectarines, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, pineapple, watermelon, Galia melon. Tinned fruit is low in potassium if you drain off the juice/syrup. Small portions only of grapes, mango, cherries, plums, honeydew / canteloupe melon.
Vegetables	Where possible, boil vegetables and drain off the water (rather than frying, microwaving or baking) to remove potassium, e.g. boiled carrots, peas, swede, leeks, kale, broad beans, broccoli, green beans, asparagus or sweetcorn. Par-boil vegetables before roasting or adding them to stews. Lettuce, watercress, cucumber, peppers and carrots can be eaten raw. Tinned or fresh tomatoes can be eaten in moderation only.
Starchy foods	Boiled Potatoes (or boiled sweet potatoes/yam/cassava/taro). Potatoes can be boiled and then mashed, roasted or fried, but limit all potatoes to 150g per day (roughly 3 egg-sized potatoes). All breads/cereals with no nuts, seeds, dried fruit, chocolate and not high in bran, e.g. Cornflakes, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, porridge, pitta bread, tortilla wraps, bagels. Rice, pasta, noodles, crumpets, English muffins, couscous, pastry, Yorkshire puddings.
Dairy	Organic alternative milks made from rice, oats, soya, almonds, hazelnuts or coconut. All types of cheese, all types of cream or crème fraîche.

Snacks	Maize or corn-based crisps e.g. Wotsits, Doritos. Rice based snacks e.g. rice cakes, popcorn. Plain biscuits, crackers, pretzels, breadsticks. Sponge cakes, doughnuts, jam tarts. Other confectionery, e.g. mints, jelly sweets, marshmallows.
Drinks	Water, including mineral water, soda water and tonic water. Tea – all types. Squash or cordials, fizzy drinks. Spirits e.g. vodka, whisky, rum, gin (in moderation).
Other	All types of cooking oil, butter or other spreads; garlic, herbs and spices, pepper. Mint sauce, apple sauce, chilli sauce, horseradish sauce, vinegars. Sweet pickle, curry powder, stock cubes, gravy granules. Jam, marmalade, honey, lemon curd, golden syrup. Mayonnaise/salad cream or other salad dressings.

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Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Renal Medicine/BHFT Dietetics

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