

Potassium Levels are Important for People Who Have Heart Disease

Importance of Potassium

Potassium is a mineral that naturally occurs in your body. Potassium helps maintain the electrical impulses of your heart. If you have too much or too little, it can affect your heart rhythm.

Some medicines (such as diuretics) may lower the amount of potassium in your body while others (such as ACE inhibitors) may raise the level of potassium.

If you have heart disease or severe diarrhea, your body may not have the right amount of potassium. For this reason, you need to watch how much potassium you eat every day. This includes any potassium supplement or medicine you take.

Potassium in Food

Depending on your health and the medicines you are taking, you may need to avoid or eat more foods high in potassium. An average adult needs at least 2,000 milligrams of potassium a day. Ask your health care team for exact amounts you should eat and examples of serving sizes.

The charts on the other side of this fact sheet show which foods are high, moderately high and low in potassium. **Portion sizes are ½ cup unless otherwise stated.**

- If you need to increase your potassium level, try to eat two to three servings of foods in the first chart (“Foods High in Potassium”) each day.

- If you need to decrease your potassium level, try to eat only one serving of food in the first chart (“Foods High in Potassium”) each day.
- If you eat more than 1 cup (one portion) of the foods in the third chart (“Foods Low in Potassium”), you may raise your potassium levels.

Potassium in Medicine

Your doctor may want you to take medicine to treat or prevent low potassium levels in your blood. If you are taking potassium medicine (such as K-Dur[®]), the following information is to help you.

General guidelines include:

- Follow your doctor’s directions.
- If you have problems swallowing the tablet whole, ask your pharmacist to give you other ways to take it.
- Follow each dose with a full glass (eight ounces) of water.
- Take this medicine with food or right after a meal.

General side effects you may have include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- stomach discomfort
- diarrhea.

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Call your doctor if you have:

- black tarry stools
- vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- stomach pain
- irregular heartbeat
- weak or heavy legs
- numbness or tingling in your hands or feet.

If you have any other side effects not listed above, please call your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Remember, if you are taking potassium medicine, be sure to watch the amount of potassium you are getting from food. Too much potassium in your blood (called hyperkalemia) can cause an irregular heart rhythm. This is a medical emergency.

Foods High in Potassium (more than 300 mg per serving)

All Bran[®], all varieties of winter squash, avocado, baked potato, banana, blackstrap molasses, Bran Buds[®], canned prune juice, canned tomato juice (1 cup), canned vegetable juices (1 cup), cooked spinach, dried beans (white or red), frozen hashbrowns and instant mashed potatoes, dried prunes, eggnog, french-fried potatoes, frozen orange juice (1 cup), lima beans, salt substitutes, sweet potatoes and yams

Foods Moderately High in Potassium (150 to 300 mg per serving)

apricots and apricot nectar, canned grapefruit juice, canned pineapple juice, cantaloupe, cooked parsnips, dates (five), dried figs (two), honeydew melon, milk and buttermilk, raisins (¼ cup), raw mushrooms, raw orange, raw plums, raw spinach, raw tomatoes, yogurt

Foods Low in Potassium (less than 200 mg per serving)

apple (and apple juice, applesauce), green or wax beans, blueberries, bread and bread products (not whole grains), cauliflower, celery, cherries, corn, cucumber, grapes, fruit cocktail, lettuce, mixed vegetables, mushrooms (fresh), onions, peaches, pasta, peas, pears, raspberries, rice, strawberries, yellow squash, zucchini