



Are You O-K<sup>+</sup>?

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National **High Potassium** Awareness Day  
5.1.20

## FACT SHEET

### What is Potassium?

Potassium is a naturally occurring mineral found in the foods we eat that helps your body function. Potassium helps your heartbeat regularly and your muscles work properly. K<sup>+</sup> is the medical abbreviation for potassium.

### What is Hyperkalemia?

Hyperkalemia is also known as High Potassium, a condition when the amount of potassium in your blood is higher than it should be. High potassium is generally considered to be 5.1 mEq/L (milliequivalents per liter) or higher. Potassium levels can be determined by a blood test.

### Why do kidney patients need to know their Potassium Levels?

High potassium can develop for a number of reasons. One of the most common causes is chronic kidney disease (CKD). Excess potassium is normally removed by the kidneys. If your kidneys are not working properly, potassium can rise to dangerous levels and you could be at risk for serious health issues. These may include an irregular heartbeat, heart attack, temporary paralysis, or even death.

### What are symptoms of high potassium?

Symptoms of high potassium (hyperkalemia) be vague or mild. High potassium is often discovered during routine blood work. Signs and symptoms may include: weakness, fatigue, tingling or numbing, irregular heartbeat, difficulty breathing, unable to move, nausea and vomiting.

### What can kidney patients do to lower or manage their Potassium Levels?

It is very important to talk to your healthcare team to discuss ways to limit your potassium intake if your kidneys are impaired. Dialysis Patients should get all treatments & exchanges prescribed to help prevent high potassium.

Learn what foods have high potassium (such as bananas and avocados) and which have low potassium (such as apples and green beans). Read more about high and low potassium foods on the backside of this Fact Sheet.

Ask your doctor about which medications could be impacting your potassium levels as well as if medication is needed to help lower or manage your potassium level.

**National High Potassium Awareness Day is 5.1.20 - learn more!**

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## Potassium and Food labels:

It is important to read food nutrition labels carefully, but please note that food companies are NOT required to list potassium content. Ask your healthcare team what to look for in the ingredients list to find if there's any hidden potassium. Review the food label diagram below.

## Potassium and Salt Substitutes:

Although lowering sodium is extremely important for kidney patients, use caution with salt substitutes (including low sodium packaged foods) because many of them contain potassium.



### High Potassium Foods (examples):

Avocados, Bananas, Beans (except green beans), Cantaloupe, Chocolate, Honeydew Melons, Mangoes, Milk, Nuts, Oranges, Papayas, Peanut Butter, Potatoes (try leaching), Spinach, Tomatoes, Winter Squash, Yogurt

### Low Potassium Foods (examples):

Apples, Bell Peppers, Berries, Cherries, Coffee, Corn, Grapes, Green Beans, Lettuce, Onions, Pasta, Peaches, Pineapple, Plums, Rice, Raspberries, Strawberries, Summer Squash, Watermelons

## Additional Resources:

The American Association of Kidney Patients ([www.AAKP.org/shop](http://www.AAKP.org/shop)) provides additional resources:

- **Nutrition Counter:** a pocket-sized brochure with nutritional values for more than 300 foods
- **AAKP Delicious! Recipe Card Series:** a kidney-friendly recipe series created to help you cook healthy, delicious meals that fit your kidney diet.
- **AAKP Kidney Friendly Recipes:**

[www.AAKP.org/recipes](http://www.AAKP.org/recipes)

## MAKING SENSE OF NUTRITION FACTS LABELS

The **Nutrition Facts** Label gives important information to all consumers. On a special diet, it can help you identify certain nutrients in your food. The following hints can help you learn how to label read.

Let's look at a label for a sauce!

**Portion Size**  
Identify the portion size of each food item. Consider the nutrition content in each portion to stay within your recommended dietary goals.

**Caution:**  
The potassium and phosphorus amount in foods are not always listed on the label.

The **ingredients** listed first are present in larger quantities. Since cheese is the third ingredient in this list, the phosphorus content could be high. Check with a registered dietitian if you are unsure if this food is allowed with your diet.

\*Potassium may not be listed in the Nutrition Facts label, but check ingredients to see if there's hidden potassium included as a food additive.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size: 1 tbsp. (14g)	
Serving Per Container: about 17	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 90	Calories from Fat 80
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 9g	14%
Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 10g	3%
Sodium 125mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 1g	0%
Fiber 0g	
Sugars 1g	
Protein 0g	
Vitamin A 2%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	Iron 0%

\*Percent **Daily Values** are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

		Calories	2,000	5,000
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g	
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g	
Cholesterol	Less than	20g	300mg	
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg	
Total Carbohydrate	Less than	300mg	375g	
Dietary Fiber	Less than	25g	30g	

**INGREDIENTS:** Soybean Oil, Distilled Vinegar, Parmesan Cheese, Chili Pepper, Whole Egg, Egg Yolks, Water, Sugar, Salt, Garlic, Lemon Juice Concentrate, Xanthan Gum, Spices, Natural Flavorings, Vitamin E, **Sodium Phosphate\***, Potassium Sorbate\* and Sodium Benzoate (used as preservatives). **CONTAINS EGG.**

Soon you will notice a change in the way your **Nutrition Facts** label looks. Those with chronic kidney disease will be pleased to know that the potassium content of each food will be included in the new label.

**% Daily Value**  
The percentages tell you if the food contains a small or large amount of a given ingredient. Daily values are based off of a 2,000 calorie diet.

Limit total fat, cholesterol and sodium as part of a healthy diet.

\*In the form of food additives, the phosphorus gets completely absorbed by the blood.

Try to choose foods without phosphorus-based additives.

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