



Are You O-K+?

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National **High Potassium** Awareness Day  
5.1.22

## 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 heart beat regularly and your muscles work properly. K+ is the medical abbreviation for potassium.

### What is high potassium?

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) can 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 and 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 back of this fact sheet.

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

**National High Potassium Awareness Day is 5.1.22 - learn more!**

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## 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.

## Potassium and Food Labels:

It is important to read food nutrition labels carefully. Good news for kidney patients: food companies are now required to list potassium content. Be sure to talk to your healthcare team about what to look for on food labels and in the ingredients list. Review the food label diagram below for some helpful tips.

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

**Tip:** Check the ingredient list, along with the Nutrition Facts label. The ingredients listed first are present in higher quantities.

**Potassium:**  
Good news for kidney patients: food labels now contain potassium amounts. Read food labels and limit the amount of potassium in your diet.

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	<b>1 cup (68g)</b>
<b>Amount per serving</b>	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>370</b>
	<b>% Daily Value*</b>
<b>Total Fat</b> 5g	<b>7%</b>
Saturated Fat 1g	<b>5%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 150mg	<b>6%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 48g	<b>15%</b>
Dietary Fiber 5g	<b>14%</b>
Total Sugars 13g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	<b>20%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 12g	
Vitamin A 10mcg	20%
Vitamin C 1mg	100%
Vitamin D 1mcg	50%
Vitamin E 2mcg	100%
Riboflavin 5mcg	75%
Folic Acid 200mcg	60%
Thiamin 2mcg	35%
Vitamin B12 5mcg	100%
Zinc 7mg	50%
Biotin 300mcg	100%
Calcium 50mcg	25%
Phosphorus 90mcg	90%
Magnesium 400mcg	100%
Chromium 75mcg	80%
Potassium 5g	100%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

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

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

**Phosphorus:**  
Chronic kidney disease patients cannot remove phosphorus very well. High phosphorus levels can cause damage to your body.

## 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

## Food Labels:

The nutrition facts label provides important information to 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.

## Additional Resources:

The American Association of Kidney Patients provides resources online at [www.AreYouOK.org](http://www.AreYouOK.org) or [www.AAKP.org/shop](http://www.AAKP.org/shop), including:

- **Nutrition Counter:** a pocket-sized brochure with nutritional values for more than 300 foods
- **Pocket Guide to Managing High Potassium:** a tool to help kidney patients and caregivers have an effective dialogue with their healthcare team about the risks associated with high potassium levels and the best way to manage it
- **AAKP Delicious! Recipe Card Series:** a kidney-friendly recipe series created to help you cook healthy, delicious meals that fit your kidney diet
- **Kidney-Friendly Recipes:** [www.AAKP.org/recipes](http://www.AAKP.org/recipes)

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