

Managing Potassium in Kidney Disease

- Potassium is a mineral in your body. It helps your nerves, muscles, and heart work properly.
- Healthy kidneys remove potassium from your body. When your kidneys do not work as well, your potassium levels may go up.
- Too much potassium in your blood is **dangerous**. It can damage your heart, cause an abnormal heartbeat, or even cause a heart attack.

Signs of high potassium are:

- › Tingling in your toes and fingers
- › Muscle weakness
- › Irregular heartbeat
- › You may not have any symptoms

Together with your dietitian and other members of your health care team, you can manage your potassium level.

What can I do if my potassium level is too high?



1. **Choose fresh foods more often.** Eat a variety of foods, including vegetables and fruits (fresh, frozen, or canned), whole grains, and protein foods (like tofu, legumes [beans, peas, lentils, chickpeas, nuts], eggs, meat, poultry, and fish).
Limit processed foods, juices, soups, and sauces as they are more likely to increase your potassium level.
2. **Consider your protein foods.** Eating too much protein can raise your potassium level. Replace some of the meat in your meals with plant-based proteins like legumes. Talk to your dietitian about how much protein is right for you.
3. **If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugars in your target range.** A higher blood sugar level can cause your potassium levels to go up.

4. **Limit additives:** Some packaged foods have potassium additives which are easily absorbed by your body. Potassium additives are often used as salt substitutes or as preservatives. Look for the word **potassium** in the ingredient list.

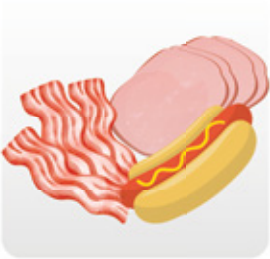
Examples of potassium additives:

- › Potassium chloride
- › Potassium lactate
- › Potassium phosphate
- › Potassium citrate

- To limit potassium additives, eat less processed or packaged foods.
- Read the ingredient list on the package. See the example below:

Precooked Chicken Breast Strips

Ingredients: Chicken breast, water, **potassium lactate**, canola oil, soy protein, modified cornstarch, dehydrated chicken flavour, sodium phosphate, salt, sodium diacetate, dehydrated garlic, dehydrated onion, sea salt. Contains: soy.



Examples of foods that may contain potassium additives:

- Processed meats:
 - › Hot dogs
 - › Bacon
 - › Deli meats (ham, turkey, salami, pepperoni)
 - › Vegetarian meat substitutes
- Electrolyte drinks (like Gatorade[®], Powerade[®])
- Salt substitutes (like Original NoSalt[®] Sodium-Free Salt Alternative)
- Powdered and liquid drink mixes (like Crystal Light)
- Processed foods labeled “low sodium”:
 - › Deli meats
 - › Pickles
 - › Vegetable juice
 - › Ketchup
 - › Canned soups
 - › Cheese

Important: Please talk to your dietitian before drinking nutritional supplements. These supplements (like Boost[®], Ensure[®], or similar products) contain high amounts of potassium, but may be OK for some people.



5. **Avoid constipation** (not being able to poop)

- Eat more fibre by choosing whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes. This will help to keep your bowels regular. This can remove extra potassium from the body.
- Be active every day, as you are able or as advised by your health care provider.
- Drink the recommended amount of fluid. Choose water most often and limit high potassium drinks, including fruit juice.
- Ask your health care team about medications to help with constipation, if needed.



6. **Cooking methods.** You can lower the amount of potassium in some foods by:

- **Double boiling:** This is the most effective way to lower potassium in foods.
 - › In lots of water, boil peeled and cut higher-potassium root vegetables (like potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, turnips, parsnips), then drain the water.
 - › Add fresh water and boil again, then drain the water and rinse the vegetables before using. This lowers potassium by about 50% (half).
- **Boiling:** In lots of water, boil higher-potassium root vegetables for 5 to 10 minutes, then drain the water and rinse the vegetables before eating. You can do this before adding vegetables to soups or stews.
- **Draining:** Drain and rinse all canned vegetables and legumes before using.
- **Soaking:** In lots of water, soak dry legumes (like beans, chickpeas, lentils, split peas) at room temperature for up to 8 hours, then drain the water and rinse the legumes before cooking.
 - › For higher-potassium root vegetables, peel and cut up the vegetables, then soak them in lots of water for 2 to 4 hours. Drain the water before cooking.




7. **Be active every day.** Exercise can help lower potassium levels.



8. **If you are on dialysis, stay for your whole treatment.** This can help to remove potassium from your blood.

Examples of high potassium foods

These foods are most likely to affect your potassium level. Limit these foods if your potassium level is high. Please talk to your dietitian about what foods are best for you.

Least processed or whole foods	Processed	Processed with potassium additives
Potatoes (unless double-boiled)	French fries	Salt substitutes
		
Tomato sauce	Potato chips	Deli meats (like ham, hotdogs)
		
Dried fruits	Chocolate bars	Low sodium dill pickles
		
Coconut water or coconut milk	Tomato-based soups	Low sodium canned soups
		
Dairy products or soy milk (limit to 1 cup a day)	Fruit or vegetable juices	Low sodium V8® juices
		
Coffee (limit to 2 cups a day)	Chocolate milk and hot chocolate	Breaded chicken strips or nuggets
		



- You may need to limit some other foods that are higher in potassium, like:
 - › Bananas
 - › Avocados
 - › Kiwis
 - › Cantaloupes
 - › Honeydew melons
 - › Passion fruit
 - › Oranges
 - › Tomatoes
 - › Cooked, leafy greens
 - › Nuts and seeds
 - › Yogurt
 - › Molasses

Do not eat starfruit.

People with kidney disease (including those on dialysis) should completely avoid starfruit. It contains a toxin (poison) that can cause:

- › Hiccups
- › Confusion
- › Insomnia (not being able to sleep)
- › Seizures
- › **In some cases, even death**



Important:

- Natural health products may have added potassium (like glucosamine). Please talk to your dietitian before taking natural health products.
- Serving sizes matter. Many lower potassium foods can become a high source of potassium in larger portions. Please talk with your dietitian about the right serving size for you.
- Grapefruit and grapefruit juice affect the way some medications work. Ask your dietitian or pharmacist if grapefruit is safe for you.

Making changes to your eating habits can be hard.
If you have any questions, please ask your dietitian.
We are here to help you.

Dietitian: _____

Phone: _____

