

## Potassium and The Kidney

### What is potassium and why is it important to you?

Potassium is a mineral found in many of the foods you eat. It plays a role in keeping your heartbeat regular and your muscles working right. It is the job of healthy kidneys to keep the right amount of potassium in your body. However, when your kidneys are not healthy, you often need to limit certain foods that can increase the potassium in your blood to a dangerous level. You may feel some weakness, numbness and tingling if your potassium is at a high level. **If your potassium becomes too high, it can cause an irregular heartbeat or a heart attack.**

### What is a safe level of potassium in my blood?

Ask your doctor or dietitian about your monthly blood potassium level and enter it here:

If it is 3.5-5.0.....You are in the **SAFE** zone

If it is 5.1-6.0.....You are in the **CAUTION** zone

If it is higher than 6.0.....You are in the **DANGER** zone

### How can I keep my potassium level from getting too high?

- You should limit foods that are high in potassium. Your renal dietitian will help you plan your diet so you are getting the right amount of potassium.
- Eat a variety of foods but in moderation.
- If you want to include some high potassium vegetable in your diet, leach them before using. Leaching is a process by which some potassium can be pulled out of the vegetable. Instructions for leaching selected high potassium vegetables can be found at the end of this fact sheet. Check with your dietitian on the amount of leached high potassium vegetables that can be safely included in your diet.
- Do not drink or use the liquid from canned fruits and vegetables, or the juices from cooked meat.
- Remember that almost all foods have some potassium. The size of the serving is very important. A large amount of a low potassium food can turn into a high- potassium food.
- If you are on dialysis, be sure to get all the treatment or exchanges prescribed to you.

**What foods are high in potassium (greater than 200 milligrams per portion)?**

**ure to check portion sizes.** While all the foods on this list are high in potassium, some are higher than others.

**High-Potassium Foods**

**Fruits**

- Apricot , raw (2 medium)  
dried (5 halves)
- Avocado (¼ whole)
- Banana (½ whole)
- Cantaloupe
- Dates (5 whole)
- Dried fruits
- Figs, dried
- Grapefruit Juice
- Honeydew
- Kiwi (1 medium)
- Mango(1 medium)
- Nectarine(1 medium)
- Orange(1 medium)
- Orange Juice
- Papaya (½ whole)
- Pomegranate (1 whole)
- Pomegranate Juice
- Prunes
- Prune Juice
- Raisins

**Vegetables**

- Acorn Squash
- Artichoke
- Bamboo Shoots
- Baked Beans
- Butternut Squash
- Refried Beans
- Beets, fresh then boiled
- Black Beans
- Broccoli, cooked
- Brussels Sprouts
- Chinese Cabbage
- Carrots, raw
- Dried Beans and Peas
- Greens, except Kale
- Hubbard Squash
- Kohlrabi
- Lentils
- Legumes
- Mushrooms, canned
- Parsnips
- Potatoes, white and sweet
- Pumpkin
- Rutabagas
- Spinach, cooked
- Tomatoes/Tomato products
- Vegetable Juices

**Other Foods**

- Bran/Bran products
- Chocolate (1.5-2 ounces)
- Granola
- Milk, all types (1 cup)
- Molasses (1 Tablespoon)
- Nutritional Supplements:  
Use only under the  
direction of your doctor  
or dietitian.
- Nuts and Seeds (1 ounce)
- Peanut Butter (2 tbs.)
- Salt Substitutes/Lite Salt
- Salt Free Broth
- Yogurt
- Snuff/Chewing Tobacco

## What foods are low in potassium?

The following table lists foods which are low in potassium. **A portion is ½ cup** unless otherwise noted. **Eating more than 1 portion can make a lower potassium food into a higher potassium food.**

### Low-Potassium Foods

#### Fruits

Apple (1 medium)  
 Apple Juice  
 Applesauce  
 Apricots, canned in juice  
 Blackberries  
 Blueberries  
 Cherries  
 Cranberries  
 Fruit Cocktail  
 Grapes  
 Grape Juice  
 Grapefruit (½ whole)  
 Mandarin Oranges  
 Peaches, fresh (1 small) canned (½ cup)  
 Pears, fresh (1 small) canned (½ cup)  
 Pineapple  
 Pineapple Juice  
 Plums (1 whole)  
 Raspberries  
 Strawberries  
 Tangerine (1 whole)  
 Watermelon (**limit to 1 cup**)

#### Vegetables

Alfalfa sprouts  
 Asparagus (6 spears)  
 Beans, green or wax  
 Cabbage, green and red  
 Carrots, cooked  
 Cauliflower  
 Celery (1 stalk)  
 Corn, fresh (½ ear) frozen (½ cup)  
 Cucumber  
 Eggplant  
 Kale  
 Lettuce  
 Mixed Vegetables  
 Mushrooms, fresh  
 Okra  
 Onions  
 Parsley  
 Peas, green  
 Peppers  
 Radish  
 Rhubarb  
 Water Chestnuts, canned  
 Watercress  
 Yellow Squash  
 Zucchini Squash

#### Other Foods

Rice  
 Noodles  
 Pasta  
 Bread and bread products: (Not Whole Grains)  
 Cake: angel, yellow  
 Coffee: **limit to 8 ounces**  
 Pies without chocolate or high potassium fruit  
 Cookies without nuts or chocolate  
 Tea: **limit to 16 ounces**

**How do I get some of the potassium out of my favorite high-potassium vegetables ?**

The process of leaching will help pull potassium out of some high-potassium vegetables. It is important to remember that leaching will not pull all of the potassium out of the vegetable. You must still limit the amount of leached high-potassium vegetables you eat. Ask your dietitian about the amount of leached vegetables that you can safely have in your diet.

### **How to leach vegetables.**

For Potatoes, Sweet Potatoes, Carrots, Beets, and Rutabagas:

1. Peel and place the vegetable in cold water so they won't darken.
2. Slice vegetable 1/8 inch thick.
3. Rinse in warm water for a few seconds.
4. Soak for a minimum of two hours in warm water. Use ten times the amount of water to the amount of vegetables. If soaking longer, change the water every four hours.
5. Rinse under warm water again for a few seconds.
6. Cook vegetable with five times the amount of water to the amount of vegetable.

### **For Squash, Mushrooms, Cauliflower, and Frozen Greens:**

1. Allow frozen vegetable to thaw to room temperature and drain.
2. Rinse fresh or frozen vegetables in warm water for a few seconds.
3. Soak for a minimum of two hours in warm water. Use ten times the amount of water to the amount of vegetables. If soaking longer, change the water every four hours.
4. Rinse under warm water again for a few seconds.
5. Cook the usual way, but with five times the amount of water to the amount of vegetable.

#### *References:*

*Bowes & Church Food Values of Portions Commonly Used, 17th Ed., Pennington, JA, Lippincott, 1998.*  
*Diet Guide for Patients with Kidney Disease, Renal Interest Group-Kansas City Dietetic Association, 1990.*

More than 20 million Americans—one in nine adults—have chronic kidney disease, and most don't even know it. More than 20 million others are at increased risk. The National Kidney Foundation, a major voluntary health organization, seeks to prevent kidney and urinary tract diseases, improve the health and well-being of individuals and families affected by these diseases, and increase the availability of all organs for transplantation. Through its 50 affiliates nationwide, the foundation conducts programs in research, professional education, patient and community services, public education and organ donation. The work of the National Kidney Foundation is funded by public donations.

The National Kidney Foundation would like to thank the  
Council on Renal Nutrition for the development of this fact sheet.

