

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Renal disease: Getting started on a low potassium diet

This information should only be used by patients with renal disease and should only be followed with supervision from a Dietitian.

What is potassium and what does it do?

Potassium is a mineral found throughout our bodies and is needed for muscle contraction (movement). Our kidneys help control the amount of potassium in the blood, when the kidneys do not work properly blood potassium levels rise.

High levels of potassium in the blood do not usually make you feel unwell, but can be dangerous, as it affects your heart rhythm and may cause a heart attack.

How can I control levels of potassium in my blood?

Potassium levels can be controlled by following a low potassium diet and, if on dialysis, attending dialysis as prescribed.

The following information will ensure you limit the amount of potassium eaten whilst consuming a wide variety of foods.

What is the normal range of blood potassium?

It should be between 3.7 - 5.5 mmol/l.

Tips to reduce potassium

- Have potatoes no more than once per day. Pasta, rice and bread are good alternatives to potatoes
- Do not use salt substitutes e.g. Lo salt, and Pan salt, as they are very high in potassium
- Limit milk to ½ pint per day. Avoid condensed milk, evaporated milk, coconut milk and coffee whiteners
- Boil vegetables instead of using a microwave, steamer or pressure cooker,



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although a microwave can be used to reheat meals

- Limit the suitable lower potassium fruit and vegetables to five portions per day

Potatoes

Always boil potatoes as this removes some of the potassium. Cut potatoes into small pieces and boil in a large quantity of water for 20 minutes, drain and throw away the water. Once boiled, potatoes can be fried, roasted or creamed.

Limit jacket potatoes, and potato products such as oven chips, potato waffles and croquettes as these will not have been pre-boiled.

Foods high in potassium to limit	Have instead – lower potassium foods
Fruit: Apricots, bananas, oranges, blackcurrants, redcurrants, rhubarb, avocado, figs, dates, mango, dried fruit, coconut, pomegranate melon, grapefruit, gooseberries	Apples, pears, tangerines or satsumas (2 small), plums (1 medium), grapes (15 only), strawberries (6 only), kiwi, olives, blackberries (20 only), raspberries (20 only) blueberries (200g) small peach or nectarine. Tinned fruit (discard juice or syrup)
Vegetables: Mushrooms, brussel sprouts, spinach, sweet potato, baked beans, parsnips, tinned tomatoes	Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, salad, 1 small tomato, red or green pepper, green/French beans, peas, sweet corn, carrots
Drinks: Coffee, fruit juice, tomato juice, drinking chocolate, Horlicks, instant teas, milk powder, milk shakes, smoothies	Tea, squash, fizzy drinks, flavoured water, tap or mineral water, fruit teas, cereal based drinks such as barley cup and Caro
Sweets: Chocolate, toffee, fudge, liquorice, coconut sweets, sweets containing nuts or dried fruit, nougat	Boiled sweets, chewing gum, mints, fruit pastilles and jellies, plain Turkish delight, plain honeycomb, sherbet
Savoury: Potato crisps, nuts, Bombay mix, twiglets	Skips, Wotsits, tortilla chips, Wheat Crunchies, Nik Naks, toffee popcorn, rice cakes such as Snack a Jacks, mini cheddars (have in moderation as these are high in salt)
Cakes and biscuits: Any cakes or biscuits with dried fruit, nuts or chocolate	Plain cakes and biscuits, biscuits with jam or cream, apple pies, doughnuts, flapjacks, pastries, plain scones, jam/lemon tarts, cream cakes and cream crackers

Patient Information

It is important that you eat well whilst following a low potassium diet. If your appetite reduces, please contact your Dietitian for further dietary advice on 024 7696 6151.

WARNING – Star fruit contains a chemical which can be extremely dangerous to people with kidney problems.

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