

Patient Information

Nutrition and Dietetics

Renal Disease: Low potassium diet - the basics

This diet sheet is intended to be used for first line low potassium advice and will be given by a member of the renal multi-disciplinary team.

In addition to this information sheet your renal doctor or nurse should refer you to the renal dietitians for additional dietary advice tailored to your nutritional intake. If you have not been referred to the renal dietitians, please contact us on 024 7696 6151 for more information and help.

If you have a poor appetite or are eating less than usual, please ask your nurse to telephone the renal dietitians **before** following this advice.

Potassium

Potassium is a mineral found in many foods in your diet. When your kidneys are not functioning properly, potassium is not removed efficiently and can build up in your blood. A high potassium levels is defined, depending on your treatment, as the following:

Predialysis or Peritoneal dialysis: >5.5mmol/L

Haemodialysis: >6.0mmol/L

A high potassium level can be dangerous because it affects muscle function in your heart, which if untreated can lead to a heart attack. Reducing the potassium content of your diet can help to control your blood potassium levels.



Other causes of high potassium to consider

Constipation

Constipation can increase your blood potassium levels. If you are constipated, please discuss with your medical team or GP, and talk to a dietitian about increasing your fibre intake.

Sodium bicarbonate

If you are prescribed sodium bicarbonate medicine for low blood bicarbonate levels, please ensure you are taking this as prescribed. If you are having any side effects that prevent you from taking your medicine, please discuss with your medical team.

Diabetes control

If you have diabetes and your blood glucose levels are regularly high, then this can cause high levels of potassium in the blood. Your dietitian or diabetes team can provide more advice on this.

Tips for following a low potassium diet

Limit potassium additives

Reduce foods that contain potassium food additives. Many processed foods contain potassium additives, which are absorbed very easily by your body and can raise your potassium levels.

Check food labels if you can and aim to avoid: Potassium phosphates, Potassium chloride, Potassium citrate, Potassium lactate. These are most commonly found in processed/packaged foods such as:

- Processed meats such as ham, sausages and burgers
- Vegetarian meat alternatives
- Processed cheese
- Lo salt/Pan salt and low salt products

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- Savoury snacks such as wotsits and skips
- Powdered drink mixes such as hot chocolate and malted drinks
- Some soft drinks such as Lucozade and Oasis

Fresh home cooked food helps to limit additives. Try cooking from fresh whenever possible.

Avoid easily absorbed potassium

Avoid sources of potassium that are easily absorbed by your body.

Main sources are:

- Coffee
- Chocolate
- Toffee/fudge
- Dried fruit, fruit juice and smoothies
- Concentrated tomato products such as tinned tomatoes and tomato puree

Aim to use tinned tomatoes or tomato puree with rice or pasta-based dishes, rather than in higher potassium potato-based meals.

Boil your potatoes

Boiling potatoes for 20 minutes removes some of their potassium into the water. Once boiled, potatoes can be roasted or chipped. Avoid potato products such as potato crisps, jacket potatoes and pre-processed potato products (oven and chip shop chips, potato waffles) as they will not have been boiled first.

Pasta and rice are good alternatives to boiled potatoes as lower potassium choices.

Reduce animal protein

The amount of protein you need per day will vary depending on your stage of kidney disease and whether you are on dialysis. Your dietitian can help guide you with this.

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For all kidney patients eating large amounts of animal protein such as meat, eggs, fish, milk, or cheese can increase your blood potassium. Whilst animal protein can be part of a healthy diet, stick to moderate portions.

Plant proteins are less likely to increase your blood potassium, so are a good alternative to animal protein sources. Try and swap some of your animal protein for plant sources such as beans/lentils/pulses/soya and tofu, or alternative milks. Some examples of this could be:

- Swapping 50% of your mince in chilli/bolognese/shepherd's pie for lentils or soya mince.
- Swapping chicken or other meat in stews or stir fries for TVP (textured vegetable protein) pieces, pieces of firm tofu, chickpeas, lentils or cashew nuts.
- Swapping dairy milk or yogurts for soya-based alternatives.
- Experimenting with new fully plant-based recipes – Kidney Kitchen has some ideas to get you started.
- Consider eating at least one plant-based meal a day.

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a very important part of your diet and can help regulate your potassium levels when eaten in the correct amounts. Aim to eat 5 portions a day.

Warning – Avoid starfruit. Starfruit contains a chemical which can be extremely dangerous to people with kidney problems.

Avoid ready-to-eat smoked or cured fish products such as smoked salmon or gravlax due to an increased risk from listeriosis.

Listeriosis is an infection caused by bacteria called listeria. People with kidney disease and people taking medicines or having treatments that weaken their immune system are amongst a group of people at higher risk of serious illness from listeriosis.

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More information on how to reduce the risk of listeriosis can be found at: [Listeriosis - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk) and [Listeria | Food Standards Agency](#).

More information

This information was produced by the Coventry Renal Dietitians, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust. If you require any further information, they can be contacted via telephone on 024 7696 6151.

You can also follow us on X (formerly known as Twitter) @UHCW_RenalDiet

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