

Potassium and Your Kidney Diet

Your kidneys remove extra potassium from your body. If your kidneys are not working properly, potassium can build up in your blood.

Too much or too little potassium can cause your heart to beat too fast, too slow, or to stop beating. Some people may not be able to feel these changes.

Food choices can affect your blood potassium levels. Your dietitian can help you adjust your choices and answer questions about potassium in your diet.

How much potassium can I have?

The amount of potassium that is best for you depends on:

- your body size
- the medicine you take
- how well your kidneys are working
- the amount of urine you make

When you are on dialysis, the *quality* of your dialysis affects your blood potassium levels. Ask your dietitian for more information.

Serving size

A food can be higher or lower in potassium, depending on how it is prepared. For example, ½ cup (125 mL) boiled spinach has more potassium than the same amount of raw spinach, because it packs together more tightly when cooked.



Potassium hidden in foods

Read the labels on food packages every time you shop. This lets you know if the food is high in potassium.

Ingredient list:

Look for the word *potassium* in the ingredient list. Some packaged foods contain potassium additives. Potassium additives are often used as salt substitutes or as preservatives. **Limit the amount of processed food you eat** to limit potassium additives.

Examples of potassium additives:

- potassium chloride
- potassium lactate
- potassium phosphate
- potassium citrate

Look for *potassium additives* in these foods:

- meat (processed and fresh with potassium additives and sodium)
- low sodium products (like ketchup, pickles)
- restructured meats (like chicken nuggets, hot dogs, ham)
- soups and broths
- powdered drink mixes
- processed cheese and cheese products
- vegetarian meat substitutes

Salt substitutes usually contain potassium chloride (like No-Salt[®] or Half-Salt[®]). Limit or avoid these if you need to lower your potassium.

Acesulfame potassium (acesulfame K) is a type of sweetener. It is absorbed differently than other potassium additives. It does not need to be avoided.

Nutrition Facts table:

Some foods have the amount of potassium in 1 serving listed on the Nutrition Facts table. Read labels, and choose foods that have the right amount of potassium for you.

Check the % Daily Value. In 1 serving:

- 15% or more is a lot of potassium
- 5% or less is a little.

If a food does not have a label, use the food lists on the next pages. They will let you know whether the food is higher or lower in potassium.

Know your potassium level

Ask your doctor or dietitian what your potassium level should be.

If your blood potassium level is too high:

- Avoid packaged foods with potassium additives.
- Avoid or limit foods high in potassium.
- Choose 5–6 servings a day of vegetables and fruit that are low in potassium.

Ask your dietitian for more information.

If your blood potassium is usually in the normal range:

- Talk to your dietitian about the right amount of potassium foods for you.

If your blood potassium level is too low:

- Eat more high potassium vegetables and fruits.
- Aim for 1–2 servings of high potassium food choices every day.

Ask your dietitian for more information.

Foods higher in potassium

Some foods higher in potassium are listed below. If your potassium levels are high you may need to limit these foods. Many of these foods are also high in phosphorus.

Talk to your dietitian about whether these foods are all right for you to eat.

Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee, coffee drinks, and black tea are higher in potassium. • If you need to lower your potassium, limit to 2–3 cups (500–750 mL) a day.
Candy and Sweeteners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chocolate, pure maple syrup, chocolate/carob desserts, and foods that contain molasses are high in potassium. • If you need to lower your potassium: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit chocolate to 15 grams (size of 1 mini chocolate bar) daily. • Limit pure maple syrup to 1 Tbsp (15 mL) a day, if used at all. • Limit chocolate or carob desserts such as chocolate cake to 1 piece a day. • Limit foods that contain molasses such as gingersnaps to 1 piece a day. • Limit your total high potassium candy and sweets to 1 serving a day.
Grain Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher potassium choices are cereals made with whole bran and foods made with these cereals. • If you need to lower your potassium, avoid whole grain products and chickpea flour rotis, or other foods made with chickpea flour. • Lower potassium choices are white, whole wheat, light rye, or sourdough breads.
Milk Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluid milks, soy beverages, yogurt, pudding, and ice cream contain potassium. • If you need to lower your potassium, limit all milk products to 1 cup (250 mL) or less a day.
Nuts and Seeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuts, seeds, and nut butters are higher in potassium. • If you need to lower your potassium: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use nuts, seeds, and nut butters sparingly. • Limit to 2 Tbsp (30 mL) a day or up to ½ cup (125 mL) in a recipe.
Beans and Lentils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beans (kidney, white, Lima, navy, pinto, soy), chickpeas, dried peas, and lentils are higher in potassium • If you need to lower your potassium, limit to ½ cup (125 mL) cooked, once a week. • Speak with your dietitian if you follow a vegetarian eating pattern.

Vegetables and fruits lower in potassium

Serving sizes are ½ cup (125 mL) or 1 medium piece unless other amounts are listed. These serving sizes provide less than 215 mg potassium a serving.

Vegetables			
• alfalfa sprouts	• collard greens	• mushrooms, raw, or canned	• spinach, raw
• asparagus	• corn	• mustard greens	• squash – summer (chayote, crookneck, mo qua)
• bamboo shoots, canned [†]	• cucumber	• okra	• squash – winter (pul qua, spaghetti)
• bean sprouts	• daikon (Chinese radish), raw	• onions, green/white	• suey choy
• beans, green/yellow	• dandelion greens	• parsley	• Swiss chard, raw
• bitter melon	• eggplant	• peas, green	• tomato, ½ raw
• bitter melon pods	• endive	• peppers, bell	• tomato sauce, ¼ cup (60 mL)
• broad beans (fava)	• fennel	• peppers, chili, canned	• turnip
• broccoli	• fiddleheads	• peppers, chili, fresh, ¼ cup (60 mL)	• turnip greens
• cabbage, green/red	• gailan (Chinese broccoli)	• potato, peeled, cubed or shredded, then boiled	• water chestnuts, canned
• carrots	• garden cress, raw	• radicchio	• watercress
• cassava, boiled	• garlic, 1 bulb	• radish	• winter melon/wax gourd
• cauliflower	• ginger root, ¼ cup (60 mL)	• rapini	• yardlong bean
• celery	• hominy	• shallots	• zucchini
• celeriac (celery root)	• jicama	• snow peas, 10 pods	
• chard, Swiss, raw	• kale		
• Chinese cabbage	• leeks		
• chives	• lettuce, all varieties		
• cilantro			

Tip: Peel potatoes and cut into small cubes or shred before boiling. Discard the water.

Tip: Tomato sauce is a higher potassium vegetable if you eat more than ¼ cup (60 mL) at a time.

Fruits			
• apple, raw, sauce, or juice	• coconut, raw or dried flakes	• honeydew	• plum, 1 raw or 2 canned
• apple pear, ½ medium	• crab apple	• kumquats	• prickly pear
• apple rings, 5 dried	• cranberry, raw, sauce or juice	• lemon or lemonade	• prunes, 3 dried or canned, ¼ cup (60 mL) juice
• apricots, 2 raw, canned, or nectar	• currants, raw	• loganberries	• raisins, 2 Tbsp (30 mL)
• blackberries	• figs, canned, 1 raw or 3 dried	• loquats	• raspberries
• blueberries	• fruit cocktail, canned and drained	• lychee, 10 raw	• rhubarb
• boysenberries	• gooseberries	• mandarin orange	• Saskatoon berries
• casaba melon	• grapes, 20 raw or juice	• mango, ½ raw	• strawberries
• cherries, 10 raw, canned		• papaya	• tangerine
		• passion fruit, 3	• watermelon
		• peach	
		• pear	
		• pineapple	

Tip: Draining juice from canned fruit will cut down on the potassium content.

Vegetables and fruits higher in potassium

Serving sizes are ½ cup (125 mL) or 1 medium piece unless other amounts are listed. These serving sizes provide more than 215 mg potassium a serving.

Vegetables			
• amaranth (yin choy)	• edamame	• potato, whole boiled, baked, or microwaved	• sweet potato
• artichokes	• gai choy (Chinese mustard greens)	• potato chips/fries, hash browns	• sword beans
• bamboo shoots, raw or boiled	• garden cress, boiled	• potato, scalloped	• taro
• beet greens	• gow gay	• pumpkin	• tomato, canned or cooked
• beets	• kohlrabi	• rutabaga	• tomato juice and V8® juice, regular or low salt
• bok choy (pak choi)	• lotus root	• saag	• tomato paste
• Brussels sprouts	• mushrooms, cooked	• sohanjna ki phali	• tomato sauce, ½ cup (125 mL)
• carrot juice	• parsnips	• spinach, boiled	• water chestnuts, raw
• cassava, raw	• paruppu keerai (lamb's quarters)	• squash – winter (acorn, butternut, hubbard)	• yams
• chard, Swiss boiled	• peas, black-eyed		
• choy sum			
• daikon (Chinese radish), boiled			

Tip: Boiling vegetables in large amounts of water can reduce their potassium content. Ask your dietitian for more information about cooking high potassium vegetables.

Tip: Limit ketchup to 2 Tbsp (30 mL) a day, if used at all.

Fruits			
• apricots, dried	• coconut milk or water	• kiwi fruit	• pomegranate, ½ raw or juice
• avocado	• currants, dried	• nectarine	• pummelo
• bael fruit	• dates	• orange, navel, raw or juice	• sapota
• banana	• durian	• passion fruit juice	• tamarind
• breadfruit	• guava	• persimmon	• tangelo
• cantaloupe	• jackfruit	• plantain	• wolfberry (goji)
• cherimoya			

Caution

Do not eat or drink **starfruit** and **starfruit juice**. These are dangerous if you have poor kidney function.

Grapefruit and **grapefruit juice** are low in potassium, but they affect the way many medicines work. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if grapefruit is safe for you to have.