

# What You Need To Know About A Low Potassium Diet



**Patient Name:**  
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**Contact Telephone Number:**

## Contents

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Introduction	3
Starchy foods	4
Cooking methods	5
Fruits and vegetables	6
Milk and dairy	9
Meat, fish and alternatives	9
Snacks and sweet foods	10
Drinks and alcohol	11
Fats	11
Miscellaneous	12
Treats	13

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## Introduction

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The diet advice in this booklet has been developed by experienced registered dietitians to help individuals with high blood potassium levels.

### ***What is potassium?***

Potassium is a mineral which is found naturally in many foods. Some potassium is needed as part of a healthy diet. It is required to ensure healthy functioning muscle, including your heart muscle.

Your potassium level should be ..... mmols/l

### ***Why is the amount of potassium in my blood too high?***

The level of potassium in your blood is usually controlled by the kidneys. When your kidneys are not working properly the potassium level in your blood may rise. It is quite common for people with kidney problems to have too much potassium in the blood. Your bowels also remove some potassium, so if you are constipated, your blood potassium level may also rise.

### ***Why do I need to control the amount of potassium in my blood?***

Too much potassium can be dangerous as it affects the rhythm of your heart and can cause a heart attack if levels are very high.

### ***Can I tell if my potassium is high?***

No. There is no reliable way, other than a blood test, to tell if your potassium is high.

### ***What should I do to control my blood potassium levels?***

There are 3 things you can do:

- Follow a low potassium diet
- Ensure regular bowel habits
- If you are on dialysis, keep to your scheduled sessions

### ***How do I follow a Low Potassium Diet?***

This leaflet explains which foods are high in potassium and need to be limited, and which foods are suitable alternatives. Your dietitian will give you individualised advice on the changes you need to make.



## **Carbohydrate (Starchy foods)**

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Carbohydrates, also known as starchy foods, provide energy, vitamins and fibre. Some starchy foods such as bread, rice and pasta are low in potassium and can be eaten freely. However, some starchy vegetables like potato, sweet potato, cassava and yam are particularly high in potassium and need to be limited in the diet.

### **Potato**

150g (5oz) potato (3 egg size potatoes) are allowed daily.

This may be swapped for 150g boiled sweet potato / yam / cassava / taro.

#### Choose

Boiled potato / sweet potato / yam / cassava / taro

Boiled and then roasted or fried potato / sweet potato / yam / cassava / taro

Mashed potato (not instant)

#### Avoid

Baked / jacket potato / sweet potato etc

Frozen / oven / microwave / retail chips

Manufactured potato products e.g. hash browns, potato waffles, potato wedges, frozen roast potatoes

Steamed potatoes / sweet potato / yam / cassava / taro

Instant mashed potato

### **Rice, Pasta and other Grains**

Pasta, rice, noodles, couscous, pastry, Yorkshire puddings and dumplings are low in potassium.

### **Breads**

#### Choose

White, granary, wholemeal breads and rolls

Pitta bread

Tortilla wraps

Bagels

Crumpets

Croissants

English muffin

#### Avoid

Breads containing nuts, seeds or dried fruits

Naan bread (limit to ½ Naan (80g) per day)

### **Breakfast Cereals**

#### Choose

Cereals that are free from bran, dried fruit, nuts and chocolate such as:

Weetabix

Shredded Wheat

Shreddies

Porridge

Cornflakes / Frosties

Special K

Rice Krispies

Cheerios

#### Avoid

Cereals containing bran, dried fruit, nuts and chocolate such as:

Muesli

All Bran

Sultana Bran

Fruit and Fibre

Bran Buds

Grape Nuts

Weetos / Choco Hoops

## Cooking methods

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The way you cook your food (especially potatoes and vegetables) can affect its potassium content. When they are boiled, some of the potassium is lost into the cooking water and this reduces the potassium content of the food. For this reason, you should:

- Boil vegetables / potatoes in plenty of water and make sure they are well cooked. Throw away this water after use. Do not use this water to make soups, gravy, curries or casseroles.
- Boil potatoes and vegetables before frying / roasting or adding to casseroles or curries.
- Peel potatoes before boiling if possible.

When little or no water is used to cook these foods, most of the potassium stays in the food. For this reason, you should:

- Avoid using a steamer, microwave or pressure cooker for cooking vegetables and potatoes. NB you can re-heat vegetables in the microwave if they have already been boiled.
- Where possible avoid stir-frying or roasting (unless vegetables / potatoes have been boiled first).



## Fruits & Vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are an important source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. However they all contain potassium, though some are higher than others. If you choose to have the lower potassium varieties then you can eat more of them. It is good to eat a variety of fruit and vegetables rather than using up your entire allowance on one type. The table below shows how many portions of fruit and vegetable you can have each day:

	Low potassium – 6 portions
<b>Or</b>	Moderate potassium – 4 portions
<b>Or</b>	High potassium – 3 portions
<b>Or</b>	Low potassium – 3 portions + Moderate potassium – 2 portions
<b>Or</b>	Low potassium – 2 portions + High potassium – 2 portions
<b>Or</b>	Low potassium – 1 portion + Moderate potassium – 3 portions
<b>Or</b>	Moderate potassium – 2 portions + High potassium – 1 portion
<b>Or</b>	Moderate potassium – 1 portion + High potassium – 2 portions
<b>Or</b>	High potassium – 1 portion + moderate potassium – 1 portion + low potassium – 2 portions
<b>Or</b>	High potassium – 1 portion + moderate potassium – 2 portions + low potassium – 1 portion

### Portions

A portion of fruit is 80g (3oz). This is about a handful of small fruit (strawberries, raspberries, grapes etc) or a portion of fruit about the size of a small apple, peach or a tangerine. For vegetables, an 80g portion is approximately 2 heaped serving spoons.

80g portions are quite small. If you have a large apple for instance, it may weigh about 160g (6oz) so this should be counted as 2 portions.

You can often get an idea of how much something weighs by looking at the packaging eg 250g punnet of fruit would contain about 3 portions.

If you enjoy eating plenty of fruits and vegetables the above guidelines will help you to continue to enjoy variety in your diet and meet your “5 a day”.

However if you do not normally eat large quantities of fruits and vegetables your dietitian may feel you can continue to eat your usual quantities of these foods. You may be given some more general guidelines such as to mainly choose those from the low and moderate groups and have the high ones only occasionally.

### Individual Guidance on Fruit and Vegetable Intake

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## Vegetables

Low potassium	Moderate potassium	Higher potassium
Beansprouts - raw	Asparagus - boiled	Artichoke (edible part) - boiled
Cabbage - boiled	Aubergine – fried	Baked beans
Carrots - boiled	Beetroot - pickled	Blackeye beans (dried) - boiled
Cauliflower - boiled	Broad beans - fresh or canned and boiled	Brussel sprouts - boiled
Chickpeas - canned	Broccoli - boiled	Butter beans - canned
Corn on the cob - boiled	Carrots – raw	Butternut squash – baked
Cucumber – raw	Celery - boiled	Cabbage – raw
Gherkins - pickled	Chicory – raw	Celeriac - boiled
Green/French beans -canned	Coleslaw - raw	Celery – raw
Leeks - boiled	Courgette - boiled	Chickpeas (dried) - boiled
Marrow – boiled	Curly kale - boiled	Chilli beans - canned
Mixed vegetables - frozen	Green/French beans - boiled	Courgette – raw
Mushrooms - canned	Kohlrabi - boiled	Fennel - boiled
Mustard and cress – raw	Lentils red (dried) - boiled	Kidney beans - canned
Olives – canned/jar	Lettuce – raw	Lentils green/brown (dried) - boiled
Onions - boiled or pickled	Mange tout – boiled/raw/fried	Mung beans (dried) - boiled
Sugar snap peas – raw/boiled/stir-fried	Mixed vegetables (canned) - boiled	Mushrooms – raw/fried
Peas - frozen or canned	Mooli – raw	Okra – boiled
Pepper red or green – raw	Onions - raw	Onions - fried
Pumpkin – boiled	Peas - mushy	Parsnip - boiled
Runner beans - boiled	Pepper yellow – raw	Split peas prepared
Squash spaghetti type - boiled	Potato salad (retail)	Raddiccio – raw
Swede - boiled	Radish – raw	Spinach (frozen) - boiled
Water chestnuts - canned	Salsify - boiled	Spring onions – raw edible part
	Shallots – raw	Tomato – raw
	Spinach - boiled	
	Spring greens - boiled	
	Squash (all summer ones) - boiled	
	Sweetcorn (baby/canned/frozen) - boiled	
	Tomato canned – whole contents	
	Turnip - boiled	
	Watercress - raw	

### Tip:

In addition to your fruit and vegetable allowance, you could choose to have a meal made with a tomato based sauce, provided you don't have potatoes that day as well. For example you could serve a tomato based dish with pasta, rice, noodles, couscous or on a pizza base. One third a 400g tin of tomatoes or one serving of a ready made sauce would be equivalent to your daily potato allowance.

### Very High Potassium Vegetables – To Avoid:

Aduki beans	Pak choi
Artichoke (Jerusalem)	Pinto beans
Bamboo shoots (canned)	Soya beans
Beetroot (fresh - boiled/raw)	Spinach (raw)
Chard, Swiss	Tomato puree
Endive	Sundried tomatoes
Mushrooms (dried)	

**Fruit**

<b>Low potassium</b>	<b>Moderate potassium</b>	<b>Higher potassium</b>
Apple	Apricot (canned)	Apricot (fresh)
Blueberries	Blackberries	Blackcurrant (stewed)
Cherries (canned)	Blackcurrant (canned)	Damson
Clementine	Cherries (fresh)	Gooseberries (raw)
Cranberries (raw)	Fig (fresh)	Grapes
Fruit cocktail (canned)	Kumquats	Greengage
Fruit pie filling	Mango (flesh only)	Guava
Gooseberries (stewed)	Melon (flesh only)	Kiwi
Grapefruit (fresh or canned)*	Papaya (flesh only)	Loganberries
Guava (canned)	Peaches (canned in juice)	Physalis (cape gooseberry)
Lemon	Pineapple (fresh)	Plums
Lime	Plums (stewed)	Prunes (canned)
Loganberries (canned)	Pomegranate (flesh only)	Redcurrants
Lychees (fresh – weighed with stone or canned)	Quince	Rhubarb
Mandarins (canned)	Raspberries	Sharon fruit
Mango (canned in syrup)	Strawberries	White currants
Mixed peel		
Nectarine (weighed with stone)		
Orange		
Papaya (canned)		
Passion fruit		
Peach (fresh weighed with stone or canned in syrup)		
Pear (fresh or canned)		
Pineapple (canned)		
Plums (canned)		
Pomelo		
Raspberries (canned)		
Rhubarb (canned)		
Satsuma		
Strawberries (canned)		
Tangerine		

- Star fruit may cause dangerous side effects in renal patients, it is therefore recommended that you avoid this.
- \* You may be advised not to have grapefruit if you are taking certain medications.

**Very High Potassium Fruits – To Avoid:**

Apricot (dried)	Dates
Avocado	Dried mixed fruit
Banana	Fig (dried)
Blackcurrant (raw)	Prunes (dried)
Coconut	Raisins
Currants (dried)	Sultanas



## Milk and dairy products

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Milk and dairy products play an important role within our diet as they contain essential nutrients such as calcium, which is needed for healthy bones, and protein which is needed for growth and repair of tissues. However milk is quite high in potassium so should be limited.

**Milk should be limited to ½ pint per day.** If you wish to have other milk products these may be taken in place of your milk allowance as follows. You may choose a total of 3 points per day. For example: milk on cereal and a small pot of yoghurt = 3 points

<b>Milk Product</b>	<b>Points</b>
<i>Half a pint of milk*</i>	3
<i>Glass of milk (200ml)</i>	2
<i>Rice pudding (200g)</i>	2
<i>Small pot of yoghurt (125g)</i>	2
<i>Milk on cereal (100ml)</i>	1
<i>Greek style yoghurt (2 tablespoons)</i>	1
<i>Custard (2 tablespoons)</i>	1
<i>Ice-cream (2 scoops)</i>	1
<i>Crème-caramel (90g pot)</i>	1

\*This includes cow's, sheep's, goat and soya milk

The following milk products are low in potassium and may be eaten freely in addition to your milk allowance:

All types cheese  
All types of cream

Crème fraiche  
Rice/oat milk

## Meat, Fish and Alternatives

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Protein is important for building and maintaining muscle. Your dietitian may advise you on the appropriate amount of protein foods that you should have.

### Choose

Meat and poultry – all types  
Fish and seafood – all types  
Eggs  
Quorn  
Tofu

### Avoid

Nuts  
Seeds

### **Pulses:**

Pulses can be eaten as part of your vegetable allowances. You can also take additional pulses in place of meat or fish. A portion of baked beans, lentils, chickpeas or kidney beans can be taken in place of a portion of meat or fish as a vegetarian meal.

## **Snacks and Sweet Foods**

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These foods are generally high in energy (calories) but vary in potassium content.

### **Savoury Snacks**

#### Choose

Maize / corn based snacks e.g. Wotsits,  
Monster Munch, Tortilla chips  
Rice based snacks e.g. Snack-a-Jacks, rice  
cakes  
Breadsticks  
Plain popcorn  
Pretzels

#### Avoid

Potato crisps  
Potato snacks e.g. Hula Hoops, Quavers etc  
Vegetable crisps  
Nuts and seeds  
Bombay mix  
Twiglets

*Many savoury snacks are high in salt so should be included in moderation within your diet.*

### **Biscuits and cakes**

#### Choose

Rich tea / Marie / Digestives / Ginger biscuits  
Short bread  
Iced biscuits  
Cream / jam filled biscuits  
Crackers  
Wafers  
Sponge cake / Battenberg / Madeira  
Fancy iced cakes  
Cream horns / Doughnuts  
Swiss roll  
Jam tarts

#### Avoid

All cakes, biscuits or cereal bars etc  
containing dried fruit, nuts or chocolate

### **Confectionary**

#### Choose

Boiled sweets  
Chewy sweets  
Jelly sweets  
Fruit pastilles  
Marshmallow  
Mints  
Turkish delight  
Candied popcorn

#### Avoid

Chocolate  
Toffee  
Fudge  
Liquorice  
Carob  
Confectionary containing dried fruit/nuts

### **Puddings**

#### Choose

Lemon meringue pie  
Jam / treacle pudding / treacle tart  
Fruit pie / crumble (using fruit from your  
allowance)  
Pavlova (using fruit from your allowance)  
Cheesecake (using fruit from your allowance)

#### Avoid

All puddings containing dried fruit, nuts or  
chocolate

**If you have diabetes then you will need to limit your intake of sugary foods and drinks.**

## Drinks & alcohol

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*If you are on a fluid allowance, ensure that you include all fluid intake within this.*

### Non-alcoholic drinks

#### Choose

Water, tonic water, soda water, flavoured water  
Cordials, Squash  
Barley water  
Tea – all types  
Camp coffee  
Fizzy drinks – lemonade, Lucozade etc  
Red Bull

#### Avoid

Fruit juices  
Hi Juice squashes  
Fruit smoothies  
Vegetable juices  
Coffee  
Drinking chocolate, cocoa, malted drinks (Ovaltine, Horlicks etc)

### Alcohol

The government recommends that men should not drink more than 3-4 units of alcohol per day, and women should not drink more than 2-3 units of alcohol per day. You should avoid alcohol if you have been advised to do so by your doctor.

#### Choose

Spirits e.g. vodka, rum, gin, whiskey

#### Avoid/Limit

Beer and lager  
Stout  
Cider  
Wine  
Champagne / sparkling wine  
Sherry  
Vermouth  
Port

If your potassium levels are well controlled you may include some beer/wine etc. See treat section below for more details.

## Fats and Oils

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Fats and oils are low in potassium and high in energy (calories). Those marked ♥ are better for your heart

Monounsaturated fats ♥	Olive oil, rapeseed oil, olive oils based spreads
Polyunsaturated fats ♥	Sunflower, soya, corn oils and margarines made from these oils
Saturated fats	Butter, cream, lard

## **Miscellaneous Foods**

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### Choose

Herbs, spices, pepper  
Garlic  
Vinegar  
Mayonnaise / salad cream  
Mustard  
Jam / marmalade  
Honey  
Lemon curd  
Golden syrup  
Horseradish  
Chilli sauce  
Curry powder  
Mint sauce  
Pickle  
Apple sauce  
Gravy granules/powder

### Avoid

Black treacle  
Peanut butter  
Soup  
Tomato ketchup  
Tomato puree  
Brown sauce  
Marmite/Bovril/Vegemite  
Chocolate spread

### **Salt Substitutes**

**Salt substitutes e.g. Lo-Salt, So-Lo, Low Sodium Salt contain potassium in place of sodium. It is important that salt substitutes are avoided.**



## Treats

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If your potassium level is well controlled you may include ..... item(s) per day from the list below as a treat. The following items in the portions specified contain similar amounts of potassium.

1 teaspoon instant coffee  
100ml filter coffee  
2 teaspoons Drinking chocolate / Horlicks / Ovaltine  
50ml Fruit juice

100ml White / Rose wine  
100ml Champagne / Sparkling wine  
75ml Red wine  
½ pint Lager / Bitter  
100ml Sherry  
200ml Vermouth

2 squares Chocolate  
1 Cadbury's Crème Egg  
1 finger Twix  
2 finger KitKat  
1 Milky Way  
1 fun size Mars Bar



## Action Plan / Notes

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