



# Controlling potassium intake: advice for people living with kidney disease

## Information for patients from the Renal Dietitians

This booklet has been developed by renal dietitians, to provide advice for people who have been told that they need to lower their potassium levels. Please use this leaflet alongside the advice given to you by your renal dietitian.

**Only follow this advice if you have been told that you need to follow a low potassium diet.**

### What is potassium?

Potassium is a mineral needed by the body to ensure healthy nerve and muscle function, including the heart. Potassium is found naturally in many foods and drinks.

### Why are my potassium levels too high?

- The amount of potassium in your blood is controlled mainly by your kidneys. If your kidneys do not work properly, they are unable to remove excess potassium from your body, and the potassium in your blood can increase to dangerous levels.
- Your body also removes potassium through your bowel, so potassium levels can become high if you are constipated.
- Certain medication may also raise potassium levels. Your kidney doctor can discuss this with you in more detail.

### What happens if my potassium levels become too high?

Some people do not have any symptoms at all, but high levels of potassium in the blood can lead to muscle weakness. If levels become too high, this can disrupt the heart rhythm and cause the heart to stop. Your doctor will tell you if you have high levels which need to be lowered.

## How will I know if my potassium levels are too high?

The only way to know is to have a blood test. The healthy range for potassium is 3.5 to 5.3 mmol/l.

## How can I control my potassium level?

In order to control your potassium levels, you need to either:

- Follow a low potassium diet, with guidance from a registered dietitian.
- Make sure you have regular bowel movements; speak to a renal dietitian if you would like advice on this.
- Have regular dialysis (if needed).

## How do I follow a low potassium diet?

Potassium is found in a large number of foods and drinks. You do not need to avoid all foods, but may need to limit some foods that are high in potassium. It is also important to stick to the recommended portion sizes. This booklet will explain which foods are high in potassium, and which foods you can eat instead (suitable alternatives).

It is important to remember that not everyone needs to limit how much potassium they eat or drink, and the advice you are given may change depending on your blood results. Your renal dietitian can give you more personalised advice.

### Fruits and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of fibre, vitamins, and minerals. They are important to include as part of a balanced diet. They are also important for healthy bowel function. If you are limiting potassium in your diet, stick to a maximum of 2 portions of fruit and 2 portions of vegetables each day. Try to include a variety, but limit how many of the higher potassium foods you eat (these are listed at the end of this leaflet).

A portion is approximately 80g (roughly the amount that fits in the palm of your hand). Examples include:

- Large fruit:  $\frac{1}{2}$  grapefruit or orange, 1 slice of pineapple, or 2 slices of mango.
- Medium fruit: 1 apple, 1 pear, 1 peach, or 1 nectarine.
- Small fruit: 2 plums, 2 satsumas, 1 handful of berries or grapes.
- Tinned fruit:  $\frac{1}{2}$  tin or 3 tablespoons.
- 2 to 3 heaped tablespoons of cooked vegetables.

### Potatoes

- Limit potatoes to one serving each day. A serving is 2 to 3 egg-sized potatoes.



- Make sure the potatoes are boiled in plenty of water, and throw out the cooking water. Boiling may help to reduce the potassium content of the food by 60 to 80%.
- Avoid jacket potatoes, crisps, oven chips, and any other potato-based products which have not been boiled first. For example, instant mashed potatoes, croquettes, wedges, or hash browns.

### **Dairy products**

Dairy products contain important nutrients for a healthy diet. However, they should be eaten in moderation if you are restricting potassium in your diet.

- Limit milk to no more than 190ml each day. This includes skimmed, semi skimmed, and full fat cow's milk.
- Soya milk has a similar potassium content to cow's milk; so this should also be limited to 190ml each day.
- Double cream can be diluted with water and used instead of milk. Mix one part cream with one part water; add more water if you like.
- Rice, oat, and hemp milk can be used in unlimited amounts, as an alternative to milk.
- Other dairy products can be used in place of the milk. For example two scoops of ice cream, a small pot of yoghurt (125g), or 2 to 3 tablespoons of custard.
- Avoid milk powder, tinned milk, or coconut milk as they are very high in potassium.

### **Cooking tips to lower potassium levels**

- Cut vegetables and potatoes into small pieces before boiling. This will make sure that some potassium comes out of the food during cooking.
- Peel and parboil vegetables or potatoes before adding to stews, soups, or curries. This will help to remove some potassium from the foods.
- Boil vegetables and potatoes in plenty of water, and throw the water away afterwards. Do not use it to make soup, sauces, or gravies, as some potassium will come out of the vegetables into this liquid, making it very high in potassium.
- Avoid stir frying, microwaving, steaming, or pressure-cooking vegetables. This keeps the potassium in the food.



## Food labels and additives

- It is important to check food labels for hidden sources of potassium from additives.
- Potassium chloride is often used in processed foods as an alternative to salt.
- Potassium sorbate is also found in some foods and drinks.
- It is very difficult to know how much potassium is found in these foods and what effect they may have on your blood levels.
- Try to limit foods which contain potassium additives.

Speak to your dietitian for more information about this.

Salt substitutes such as Lo-Salt and So-Low are not recommended, as they contain high levels of potassium in place of sodium. Be careful when using products labelled as 'low sodium' or 'reduced salt' as they may contain salt alternatives. Always check the ingredients list.

## Fruit

Lower potassium	Moderate potassium	Higher potassium
Apple	Blackberries	Apricots
Blueberries	Cherries	Avocado
Clementine	Figs	Banana
Lemon	Mango	Blackcurrant
Lime	Raspberries	Coconut
Nectarine	Strawberries	Dried fruit, such as raisins, sultanas, and dates
Orange		Gooseberries
Passion fruit		Grapes

Lower potassium	Moderate potassium	Higher potassium
Pear		Kiwi
Peach		Melon
Pineapple		Rhubarb
Plum		
Satsuma		
Tangerine		

## Vegetables

Lower potassium	Moderate potassium	Higher potassium
Cabbage	Asparagus	Artichoke
Carrots	Aubergine	Baked beans
Cauliflower	Broccoli	Beetroot
Corn on the cob	Celery	Brussel sprouts
Cucumber	Kale	Butternut squash
Green beans	Spinach (boiled)	Kidney beans
Leeks	Turnip	Lentils
Lettuce		Mushrooms
Olives		Parsnip
Onion		Spinach (raw)
Sugar snap peas		Sundried tomatoes
Peas		Tinned tomatoes
Pepper		Tomatoes (raw)
Pumpkin		
Swede		
Water chestnuts		

## Meat, fish, and alternatives

Choose	Limit
All types of meat, poultry, or fish	Nuts

Choose	Limit
Eggs	Seeds
Quorn	
Tofu	

## Cereals

Choose	Limit
Cheerios	Cereals containing bran, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, and chocolate. Examples listed below.
Cornflakes	All Bran
Frosties	Coco Pops
Porridge	Fruit & Fibre
Rice Krispies	Granola
Shredded Wheat	Museli
Special K	Sultana Bran
Weetabix	Weetos

## Bread

Choose	Limit
White, wholemeal, malted, or granary bread	Any bread containing nuts, seeds, or dried fruit. For example seeded bread, currant buns, or fruit loaf.
Bagels	Full sized naan bread. Stick to 1/2 a standard sized naan bread or 1 mini naan.
Crumpets	
Criossants	
English muffins	
Pitta bread	
Tortilla wraps	

## Starchy foods

Choose	Limit
Couscous	

Choose	Limit
Noodles	
Pasta	
Rice	

### Savoury snacks

Choose	Limit
Maize, corn, or wheat-based snacks. Examples listed below.	Bombay mix
Monster Munch (roast beef flavour only)	Nuts and seeds
Nik Naks (all flavours)	Potato crisps
Pom Bears	Potato based snacks, such as Hula Hoops and Pringles
Space Raiders (all flavours)	Skips
Sun Bites (all flavours)	Twiglets
Tortilla chips (plain)	Vegetable crisps
Breadsticks	
Crackers	
Popcorn	
Pretzels	

### Biscuits and cakes

Choose	Limit
Plain biscuits, such as Rich Tea, Digestives, Ginger Nuts, and shortbread.	All biscuits and cakes containing dried fruit, nuts, chocolate, or coconut.
Doughnuts and iced buns	
Plain sponge cake	
Jam tart	

### Puddings

Choose	Limit
Fruit pie	Puddings containing dried fruit, nuts, chocolate, or coconut.

Choose	Limit
Lemon tart	
Meringue	
Sponge pudding	
Vanilla cheesecake	

## Confectionary

Choose	Limit
Boiled sweets	Chocolate
Chewy sweets	Fudge
Fruit Pastilles	Liquorice
Marshmallow	Toffee
Mints	
Turkish Delight	

## Drinks

Choose	Limit
Water	Fruit juices
Flavoured water, tonic, soda, and sparkling water.	Smoothies
Fizzy drinks	Hi Juice
Cordial or squash	Coffee
Tea	Drinking chocolate
Spirits, such as vodka, gin, and rum	Cocoa
	Horlick's
	Ovaltine
	Beer, lager, and stout
	Cider
	Wine
	Port



## Other foods

Choose	Limit
Condiments, including horseradish, mayonnaise, mustard, mint sauce, pickle, and salad cream.	Brown sauce
Herbs and spices	Bovril
Garlic	Marmite
Vinegar	Tomato ketchup
Apple sauce	Tomato puree
Golden syrup	Leek and potato soup
Honey	Mushroom soup
Lemon curd	Tomato soup
Jam or marmalade	Chocolate spread
	Peanut butter

## Further information

- Kent Kidney Patients Association (<https://www.kentkidneypatients.co.uk/>)
- Kidney Care UK (<https://www.kidneycareuk.org/>)
- Kidney Kitchen: Kidney Care UK (<https://kidneycareuk.org/get-support/healthy-diet-support/kidney-kitchen/>)  
Provides kidney friendly recipes and booklets to download.
- Kidney Research UK (<https://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/>)
- National Kidney Federation (NKF) (<https://www.kidney.org.uk/>)

If you have any questions, please contact the renal dietitians on 01227 868789.

## What do you think of this leaflet?

We welcome feedback, whether positive or negative, as it helps us to improve our care and services.

If you would like to give us feedback about this leaflet, please fill in our short online survey. Either scan the QR code below, or use the web link. We do not record your personal information, unless you provide contact details and would like to talk to us some more.

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MDOBU4/>



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If you would rather talk to someone instead of filling in a survey, please call the Patient Voice Team.

- **Patient Voice Team**

Telephone: 01227 868605

Email ([ekhuft.patientvoice@nhs.net](mailto:ekhuft.patientvoice@nhs.net))

### Ask 3 Questions

There may be choices to make about your healthcare. Before making any decisions, make sure you get the answers to these three questions:

- What are my choices?
- What is good and bad about each choice?
- How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

Your healthcare team needs you to tell them what is important to you. It's all about shared decision making.

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.**

**Please let us know:**

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

**You can let us know this by:**

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

**Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments**, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email ([ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)).

**Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient information leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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