

# Kidney disease – low potassium diet

Dietetics

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Information for Patients

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**This diet sheet is for people who have blood potassium levels that are too high.**

## What is potassium?

Potassium is a mineral that your body needs to function properly. It helps nerves and muscles. For example, it helps your heart work properly. Potassium is found in food and drinks.

It is important to try to keep your blood potassium level within or close to your recommended range. Talk with your dietitian or doctor about what this is for you.

If you have chronic kidney disease (CKD) you can check your potassium levels by registering on Patient Knows Best. This is an online service and can be found at: <https://patientsknowbest.com>

## How does CKD affect potassium levels in the blood?

Your kidneys help keep the right amount of potassium in your blood. They do this by removing extra potassium in your pee. When your kidneys are not working properly, they do not remove potassium like healthy kidneys do. This can cause the level of potassium in your blood to rise. This is called hyperkalaemia (hyper (high) kalaemia (blood potassium)). Too much potassium in your blood can be dangerous because it can cause an irregular heartbeat.

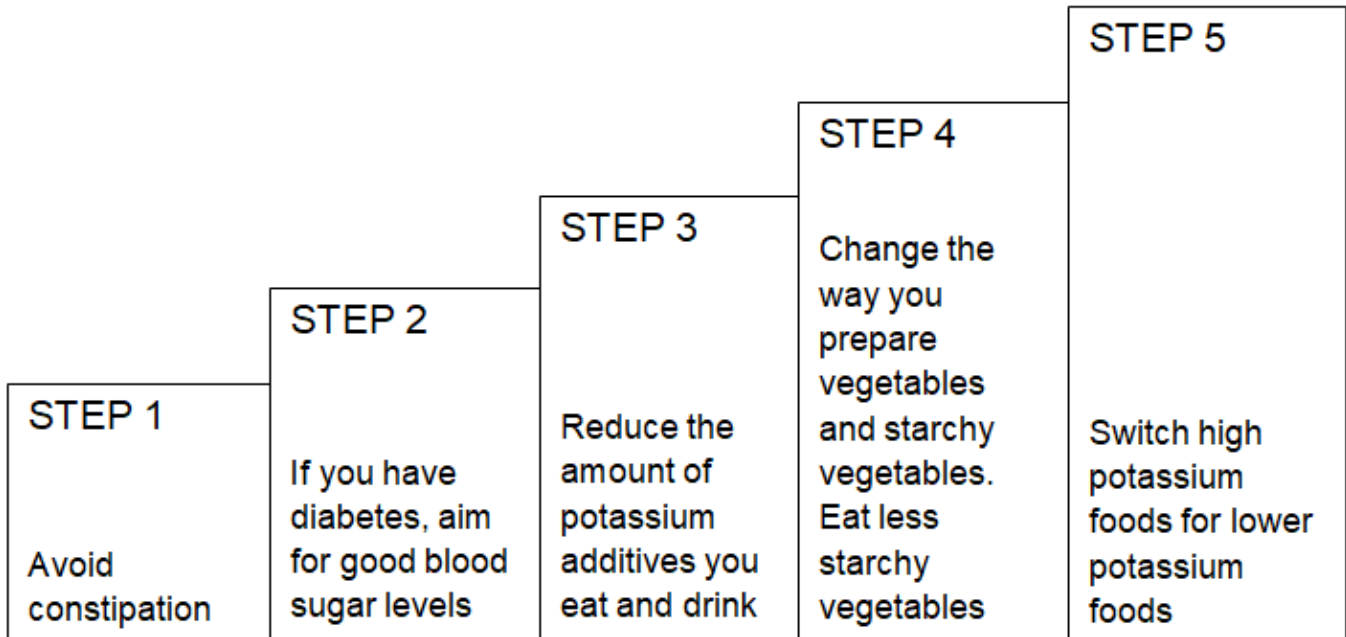
Potassium levels can also go up when you take certain medicines. These medicines include ACE inhibitors (like Lisinopril, and other medicines ending in 'pril'), ARBs (Losartan and other medicines ending in 'sartan'), and Finerenone. If you take any of these, keep taking them the way your doctor told you. They can help protect your kidneys and slow down further damage.

These medicines are helpful for some people, but not everyone will need them. If you are not sure about your medicines, you can talk to the doctor at your next check-up.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://www.uhleicester.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## How can I keep my potassium at a safe level?



### Step 1: Avoid constipation.

Constipation can cause high potassium levels. Constipation means you do not poo often, or it is hard to poo when you try. Constipation is common in people with kidney disease. To help manage constipation you must:

- drink enough fluid. This should be up to your fluid recommendation or allowance.
- be more physically active.
- eat foods that are high in fibre (roughage). This includes wholemeal bread, brown cereals such as Weetabix or Shredded Wheat, pulses, fruit and vegetables.

Some medicines used to treat constipation (laxatives) contain potassium. Check with your doctor if you are prescribed a laxative.

### Step 2: If you have diabetes, aim for good blood sugar levels.

High potassium levels can be caused by having high blood sugar levels. Speak to a doctor or a healthcare professional if you need support to improve your blood sugar levels.

### Step 3: Reduce the amount of potassium additives you eat and drink.

Food additives that contain potassium are being used more often to preserve and flavour foods. They are found in processed foods. Processed foods are foods that have been changed from their natural form. This means they might have added salt, sugar or preservatives or been cooked, frozen, or put in a packet.

Potassium additives in food and drinks are absorbed into the body quickly. It can easily increase your blood potassium. Try to avoid salt substitutes as they often contain an additive called potassium chloride like Lo Salt, So-Low and supermarket 'reduced sodium salt'.

Potassium additives are shown in ingredients lists. Different brands and flavours of the same item can have different ingredients. Check labels to find one without a potassium additive.

Some potassium additives have a bigger effect on your blood potassium level than others. The ones to look out for and avoid are shown below.

Potassium additives to avoid	
Potassium chloride	E508
Potassium phosphate	E340
Potassium citrate	E332
Potassium lactate	E326

Other potassium additives such as **potassium sorbate** and **acesulfame K** tend to have less of an effect on potassium levels, so these are **fine to have**.

If you are trying to lower your potassium intake, choose fresh or homemade foods more often. These should be completely free from additives.

## Step 4: Change the way you prepare vegetables and starchy vegetables. Cut down on starchy vegetables.

### Step 4a: Vegetable preparation

- Vegetables and starchy vegetables such as potatoes, yam, taro tuber, cassava and sweet potatoes are high in potassium.
- Boiling helps to lower the potassium content by washing out some of the potassium into the water. Before boiling, peel the vegetables (where possible) and cut into smaller diced pieces (about half (1/2) inch) to help with this.
- Throw the water away after boiling or par boiling. Do not use this water to make gravy, stocks, sauces or soups.
- If frying, air frying or roasting, partly cook by boiling first (par boil), to help lower the potassium content.
- Avoid steaming, microwaving or baking potatoes and vegetables (unless you have boiled them first).
- Avoid frozen, oven, and shop-bought or 'chip shop' chips and processed potato products such as potato waffles, croquette potatoes.

- You do not need to boil stir-fry vegetables first but serve with rice/ pasta/ noodles instead of potatoes to keep the potassium content of your meal down.

### Step 4b: Cut down on starchy vegetables

- Keep to a portion size of 150g (6oz) of starchy vegetables (potatoes, yam, taro tuber, cassava and sweet potatoes) per day. Prepare using the advice above.
- Use other starchy foods more often to lower your potassium intake. For example, pasta, rice, noodles, couscous, bulgur wheat, bread, crackers, cereals, chapatti.

### Step 5: Switch high potassium foods for lower potassium foods.

Potassium is found in most foods and drinks, in different amounts. You do not need to cut out whole food groups.

The next few sections guide you through the best changes to start with so you stay healthy and do not miss out on important nutrients that your body needs.

### Step 5a: Cut down on snacks, sweets, and fizzy drinks

These are not very healthy and are more likely to contain potassium additives. Check all ingredients lists and avoid foods with potassium additives. Different brands and flavours of the same item can have different ingredients. Check labels to find one without a potassium additive.

Choose more food and drinks from the lower in potassium options.

Savoury snacks	
Higher in potassium (limit)	Lower in potassium (better to have)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any savoury snack that contains a potassium additive. Check ingredients like pretzels, tortilla chips.</li> <li>Potato crisps, quinoa snacks, vegetable crisps.</li> <li>Twiglets, Bombay mix, savoury snacks made with chickpea (gram) flour. For example, Hippeas, pakora, bhaji.</li> <li>Savoury items made using gram, chickpea, bean flour, millet, soya flour. For example, poppadoms and bhajis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corn, maize, wheat, lentil based snacks that do not contain a potassium additive. Always check ingredients.</li> <li>Tortilla chips and pretzels that do not contain potassium additives</li> <li>Popcorn, breadsticks, crackers, rice snacks, rice cakes.</li> <li>Handful of unsalted nuts.</li> <li>Savoury items made with wheat flour (white, brown, wholemeal), rice flour, corn flour, chapatti flour.</li> </ul>

### Sweet snacks and desserts

If you have diabetes, too many sweet snacks and desserts may lead to higher blood sugar levels.

Higher in potassium (limit)	Lower in potassium (better to have)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chocolate, toffees, liquorice, fudge, carob, burfi.</li> <li>Biscuits, cakes, flapjack, cereal bars containing chocolate, dried fruit or nuts and seeds.</li> <li>High protein puddings, chocolate mousse, chocolate gateau, mango sorbet, banoffee pie, Christmas pudding, chocolate ice cream.</li> <li>Milk-based puddings (see step 5c).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boiled sweets, pastilles, jellies, chewing gum, mints, marshmallows, jalebi, gulab jamun.</li> <li>Doughnuts, jam tarts, plain or cream sponge cake, meringue, swiss roll, plain biscuits, wafer, ginger, shortbread, jam or cream filled, plain flapjack, plain cereal bar, sweet items made with wheat flour, rice flour, corn flour.</li> <li>Tiramisu, trifle, cheesecake, fruit gateau, profiteroles, fruit crumble, fruit pie, fruit mousse, fruit pavlova, vanilla or fruit</li> </ul>

### Drinks

Higher in potassium (limit)	Lower in potassium (better to have)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fruit juice, vegetable juice, Ribena and blackcurrant drinks, high-juice squash, coconut based drinks, cocoa, drinking chocolate and malted milk drinks. For example, Horlicks, Ovaltine.</li> </ul> <p>Coffee (all types).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potassium is found in both the coffee and the milk so limit to 1 cup per day .</li> <li>Potassium content will be particularly high in espresso or those made with a lot of milk like a latte.</li> </ul> <p>Cider, wine, lager, beer, stout.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep to a small glass, if taken. Try to have 2 to 3 alcohol free days per week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fizzy drinks (lemonade) and squashes (orange and lemon). Choose diet, no sugar versions for less sugar.</li> <li>Tea, herbal teas and cold tea infusions.</li> <li>Spirits (whisky, gin, brandy), sherry, port.</li> </ul>

### Other foods

Higher in potassium (limit)	Lower in potassium (better to have)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Black treacle</li> <li>Bovril, Marmite</li> <li>Tomato puree</li> <li>Soup (tinned and packet)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jam, marmalade</li> <li>Honey, syrup</li> <li>Butter, margarine, low fat spreads</li> <li>Oils</li> </ul>

### Step 5b: Avoid eating large portions (more than 150g or 6oz) of meat and fish regularly.

- Meat and fish give you protein which is important for your health, but they also contain a lot of potassium.
- Try to include some 'meat/ fish-free' meals sometimes.
- Combine smaller portions of meat or fish with vegetarian sources of protein instead.
- Beans, pulses and nuts don't raise your potassium levels as much as meat and fish. Use 100 to 150g (4 to 6oz) beans/pulses per portion or a small handful of nuts. Beans and pulses in cans and jars, which are then drained, are lower in potassium than dried varieties.
- Quorn, tofu and pea protein foods can also be used instead of meat and fish. If processed, check labels for potassium additives. Soya mince is high in potassium.
- Eggs are a good alternative too.

### Step 5c: Limit milk and milk-based foods

Milk and dairy foods	
Higher in potassium (limit)	Lower in potassium (better to have)
<p>Cow's milk and soya milk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit to 200ml (1/3 pint) per day.</li> <li>• Use for hot drinks, breakfast cereals, milk-based sauces and milk puddings such as custard, rice pudding.</li> </ul> <p>Condensed milk, evaporated milk, coconut milk, coconut cream and dried milk</p> <p>Yoghurt (all types):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit to 250g across the week.</li> <li>• Yoghurt can be eaten and used to make lassi (use more water than yoghurt), khadhi (kadhi), tzatziki or raita.</li> </ul> <p>High protein milk and yoghurt, kefir.</p>	<p>Rice, oat and nut milks (containing less than 10% nut) are lower in potassium and may be used.</p> <p>All types of cream and crème fraiche.</p> <p>Fromage frais contains less potassium than yoghurt.</p> <p>Cheese (all):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most cheese is high in phosphate, so limit if your phosphate level is high.</li> </ul>

## Step 5d: Eat more lower potassium fruit and vegetables

Eating fruit and vegetables gives you fibre. This helps you poo regularly. If your kidneys do not work well, your body gets rid of extra potassium through your poo. Without enough fibre, you may get constipated. This can make potassium build up in your blood.

Aim to eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day. A portion size is 80g (small cup). Try to include a variety of fruit and vegetables rather than choosing the same ones every day. Canned/ tinned fruit and vegetables are lower in potassium than fresh. Refer to **Step 4** for how to prepare vegetables.

Tomatoes are high in potassium. Stick to the 80g portion size (1/4 large tin or equivalent of 4 to 5 cherry tomatoes). If using in cooking (in a curry or pasta sauce), serve with a lower potassium starchy food like pasta, rice, noodles or bread, rather than potatoes.

All fruit and vegetables naturally contain potassium, but some contain more potassium than others. **The list below shows fruit and vegetables which contain lower amounts of potassium.** Use these options where possible for your 5 portions. If you eat fruit and vegetables that are not listed and would like further information, talk with your dietitian. It is recommended that all patients with kidney disease avoid star fruit as it may be harmful.

Fruit	Vegetables	
Apple	Asparagus	Methi
Blueberries	Aubergine	Mushrooms (canned)
Blackberries	Baby sweetcorn	Onion
Cherries	Beansprouts	Peas
Clementines	Broccoli	Pepper: Green, red or
Gooseberries	Butternut squash	yellow (raw)
Grapes	Carrots	Pumpkin
Grapefruit (check medication)	Cabbage	Radish
Guava	Cauliflower	Runner beans
Kiwi	Courgette	Spring greens
Lemon, lime	Cucumber	Spring onion
Lychees	Curly Kale	Sugar snap peas
Melon (honeydew, watermelon or galia)	Frozen mixed vegetables	Swede
Oranges	Gourd: Ash, Bottle (Dhoodi), Round (Tinda),	Sweetcorn (canned)
Passion fruit	Ivy (Tindora)	Turnip
Peaches	Leeks	Water chestnuts (half a tin)
Pears	Lettuce	Canned ackee, karela, kantola
Pineapple	Mangetout	and okra
Plums	Marrow	
Raspberries		
Sharon fruit		
Strawberries		
Tangerines, satsumas		
Tinned fruit (drained)		



## Hospital admission

If you are admitted to hospital, the hospital has a renal menu which has meals with less potassium than the standard menu. Please ask for a renal menu.

## Recipes

Kidney Care UK have worked with dietitians and chefs to create some kidney-friendly recipes.

Visit <https://kidneycareuk.org> and search for Kidney Kitchen.

You can choose recipes based on your individual needs. All recipes have been very carefully analysed and approved by the British Dietetic Association's Kidney Dietitian Specialist Group (KDSG).

## Contact details:

If you have any questions or concerns about lowering potassium in your diet, please contact your renal dietitian (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm).

If you are calling outside of these times, please leave a message and we will call you back.

Contact number for Leicester Kidney Dietitians: **0116 258 8002**

If you are under the care of a Dietitian outside of Leicester, please contact your local service.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

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