

# Managing high potassium levels to support medicines used for kidney disease

Dietetics

Produced: February 2024

Review: February 2027

Information for Patients

Leaflet number: 1487 Version: 1

## Introduction

Some medicines used to treat your kidney disease can cause the level of potassium in your blood to go too high. These include ACE inhibitors (medicines ending in 'pril' such as Ramipril), angiotensin 2 blockers (medicines ending in 'sartan' such as Losartan) and some types of diuretics (water tablets such as Spironolactone).

These medications protect your kidneys and heart, so it is best to continue taking them. But, you should try to keep your blood potassium level down. To do this, follow the 5 steps shown in this leaflet. If the level of potassium in your blood does not come down, some people may need additional medicines. Your doctor or healthcare professional will advise you if this is needed.

## 5 steps to lowering your potassium levels

### STEP 1: Make sure that you are not constipated

Constipation can contribute to high potassium levels. Constipation is where you have changes to how you poo, including not pooing as often or finding it hard to poo. Sometimes it can cause piles, which are lumps inside and around your bottom (anus). It is common and affects people of all ages. Drinking more fluid, being more active and including foods that are high in fibre (roughage) can help treat and prevent constipation (e.g. wholemeal bread, brown cereals such as Weetabix or Shredded Wheat). Some medicines used to treat constipation (laxatives) contain potassium, so check with your Doctor if you are prescribed a laxative.

**STEP 2:** If you have diabetes, try to keep your blood sugar levels well controlled

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

**STEP 3:** Reduce your intake of potassium additives in food and drinks.

- Eat more freshly prepared food rather than processed food. This will avoid potassium additives completely.
- Potassium additives are added to many foods and drinks. They can increase potassium levels in your blood. Check food labels to identify them. Sometimes, you can make a simple switch of food brands to avoid them.
- Many food manufacturers are lowering the salt content of foods by switching sodium chloride (salt) for potassium chloride instead. Check labels and avoid potassium additives.
- Avoid salt substitutes e.g. Lo Salt.

Potassium Additives		
Potassium chloride	E508	Other potassium additives such as potassium sorbate and acesulfame K tend to have less of an effect on potassium levels.
Potassium phosphate	E340	
Potassium citrate	E332	
Potassium lactate	E326	

**STEP 4:** Change the way you prepare vegetables and starchy vegetables

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 of vegetables, as some of the potassium moves out of the vegetable into the water. Peeling the vegetable and cutting into smaller pieces will help this process.
- Par boil potatoes (partly cook by boiling) to lower the potassium content before frying, air frying or roasting.
- Throw the water away after boiling or par boiling; do not use to make gravy, stocks, sauces or soups.
- Avoid steaming, microwaving or baking potatoes and vegetables.

**NOTE.** Although boiling starchy vegetables lowers the potassium content, they still contain potassium. Other starchy foods (e.g. bread, pasta, rice, chapatti, noodles, couscous, cereal products) are much lower in potassium. Include these in your diet more often to reduce your potassium intake further.

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

Foods rich in protein are necessary for health but in large amounts are not recommended for people with CKD.

- Animal sources of protein such as meat and fish can provide high amounts of potassium so avoid eating large portions (more than 100g).
- In comparison, vegetarian sources of protein such as beans and pulses provide less potassium while providing some additional fibre. Eating more of these sources of protein instead, can be beneficial.
- Meat substitutes, such as quorn, tofu and pea protein, are often used in convenience foods like burgers and sausages. These are also a good option. Avoid those made with a high percentage of soya protein. Check labels for potassium additives.
- For those that eat meat and fish regularly, try to include some 'meat-free' meals.

The following tables show you some foods that are high in potassium. It then gives you different options so that you can reduce the potassium in your diet.

## Snacks

Some snacks (sweet and savoury) can be high in potassium. Choose to eat snacks from the lower potassium options to reduce your potassium intake. If you have diabetes, you may already limit some of the foods shown below.

**NOTE.** Eating fewer snacks will reduce your overall calorie intake and may lead to weight loss. This may be beneficial to your health if you are overweight. However, if you are underweight, make sure that you replace these foods with the lower potassium options or other foods (e.g. bread) to reduce the risk of weight loss. If you are concerned about losing too much weight, discuss this with your GP.

Higher in potassium	Choose lower potassium options
<p>Chocolate / toffees / liquorice / fudge / car-ob / burfi</p> <p>Potato crisps / savoury snacks containing potassium additives / Sesame snacks / Veg-etable crisps / Nuts and seeds / savoury snacks made with gram (chickpea) flour</p> <p>Biscuits / cakes / flapjack containing choco-late, dried fruit or nuts</p> <p>High protein puddings / chocolate mousse</p>	<p>Boiled sweets / pastilles / jellies / chewing gum / mints / marshmallows / jalebi / gulab jamun</p> <p>Corn / maize / wheat based snacks that do not contain potassium additives Pretzels / Popcorn / Breadsticks / crackers / rice snacks / rice cakes / mumra / cornflake mix <b>NOTE. These foods can be high in salt</b></p> <p>Doughnuts / jam tarts / plain or cream sponge cake / biscuits – plain, wafer, ginger, shortbread, jam or cream filled / meringue / plain flapjack or cereal bar</p> <p>Fromage frais / soya yoghurts / fruit mousse OR yoghurts - limit to 2 small pots (or 250g) per week</p>

## Drinks

Some drinks can be high in potassium. Choose drinks from the lower potassium options to reduce your potassium intake

Higher in potassium	Choose lower potassium options
<p>Fruit juice / vegetable juice Ribena &amp; blackcurrant drinks Coconut based drinks</p> <p>Cocoa &amp; drinking chocolate Malted milk drinks (e.g. Horlicks) Coffee – limit to 1 cup per day Milk to drink that is more than the ½ pint per day advised</p> <p>Cider, wine, sherry, port, lager, beer, stout – limit to 1 small glass</p>	<p>Fizzy drinks (for example, cola, lemonade) and fruit squash. Consider low sugar / diet options</p> <p>Tea &amp; herbal teas Milk can be used in tea, coffee and cereal (up to ½ pint per day). Milk substitutes can be used too (for example, soya milk, rice milk, oat milk and nut milks).</p> <p>Spirits (for example, whisky, gin, brandy)</p>

**NOTE. To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level, both men and women are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week, spread across 3 days or more. That's around 6 medium (175ml) glasses of wine or 6 pints of 4% beer.**

## Vegetables

Vegetables are needed as part of a healthy diet. However, some vegetables are higher in potassium than others.

Aim to eat 2 to 3 portions of vegetables each day. This will help to keep you pooing regularly. An adult portion of fruit or vegetables is 80g. This is about 3 heaped tablespoons. Some vegetables are particularly high in potassium. Choose to eat more of the lower potassium vegetables

Higher in potassium	Choose lower potassium options	
Artichoke Avocado Baked beans Beetroot (raw / boiled) Broad beans Brussels sprouts Callaloo Celeriac Chard Drumstick pods/ leaves Edamame beans Guar Green beans Karela Kantola Mushrooms Okra Parsnips Spinach (canned or fresh) Sundried tomatoes Sweetcorn on the cob Tomato (canned or fresh)	Asparagus Aubergine Baby sweetcorn Beansprouts Broccoli Butternut squash Carrots Cabbage Cauliflower Courgette Cucumber Curly Kale Frozen mixed vegetables Gourd – Ash, Bottle (Dhoodi), Round (Tinda), Ivy (Tindora) Leeks Lettuce Mangetout Marrow Methi	Mushrooms (canned) Onion Peas Pepper - Green, red or yellow (raw) Pumpkin Radish Runner beans Spring greens Spring onion Sugar snap peas Swede Sweetcorn - canned Turnip Water chestnuts (half a tin) Canned ackee, karela, kantola and okra

## Fruit

Fruit is needed as part of a healthy diet. However, some fruits are higher in potassium than others.

Aim to eat 2 to 3 portions of fruit each day. This will help to keep you pooing regularly. An adult portion of fruit or vegetables is 80g. This is about a handful of smaller fruit (e.g. strawberries), 1 medium fruit (e.g. apple) and 1 slice of large fruit (e.g. melon). Some fruit are particularly high in potassium. Choose to eat more of the lower potassium fruits to reduce your potassium intake.

Higher in potassium	Choose lower potassium options
Apricot Avocado Bananas Blackcurrants Coconut Custard apple Damsons Dates Dried fruit - all (e.g. sultanas, prunes, raisins) Elderberries Figs Loganberries Mango Melon (Cantaloupe) Nectarines Papaya Pomegranate Redcurrants Rhubarb	Apple Blueberries Blackberries Cherries Clementines Gooseberries Grapes Grapefruit (half) Guava Kiwi Lemon / lime Lychees Melon (honeydew, watermelon or galia) Oranges Passion fruit Peaches Pears Pineapple Plums Raspberries Sharon fruit Strawberries Tangerines/ satsumas Tinned fruit (drained juice)

## 5 Steps to lowering your potassium levels - Summary

If your potassium levels go high as a result of the medicines you have been advised to take, follow the 5 steps to lowering your potassium level.

**STEP 1:** Avoid constipation

**STEP 2:** If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugars well controlled

**STEP 3:** Avoid potassium additives

- Check labels for potassium chloride (E508), potassium phosphate (E340) and potassium citrate (E332)
- Eat more freshly prepared food rather than processed food.

**STEP 4:** Change the way you prepare vegetables and starchy vegetables

- Boil vegetables and starchy vegetables rather than steaming, microwaving or baking potatoes and vegetables

**STEP 5 :** Switch high potassium foods for lower potassium options

## Where can I find further information?

Kidney Care UK - [www.kidneycareuk.org](http://www.kidneycareuk.org)

- General information about kidney disease

Kidney Kitchen (found on the Kidney Care website)

- Kidney friendly recipes with suitable options for low potassium meals

**Contact details:** Contact your GP or practice nurse if you have any questions

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