PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Potassium in Your Diet

This information explains what potassium is and how much your body needs every day. It lists foods that have potassium and how to get potassium in your diet.

What is potassium?

Potassium is a mineral your body needs to work properly. Potassium helps:

- Your body keep normal levels of fluid inside your cells.
- Your nerves function.
- Your muscles contract (tighten).
- Keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.
- Keep your heartbeat regular.

You can eat healthy food with potassium every day. The key to choosing foods with potassium is having the right balance for your needs. Too little potassium in the blood can cause severe muscle weakness and cramps. Too much potassium in the blood can cause irregular (not regular) heartbeats. This can harm your or even kill you.

Talk with a clinical registered dietitian-nutritionist (RDN) to make a daily plan that is right for you.

Reading nutrition labels

The nutrition facts label shows the amount of nutrients per serving (see Figure 1). Check serving sizes closely. For example, a serving of dried raisins is ¼ cup and serving of fresh grapes is ½ cup.

- **Serving size:** One portion of a food.
- **Servings per container:** How many servings are in a container or package.
- **% Daily Value (DV):** The percentage of a nutrient in one serving of a food, based on a 2,000-calorie daily diet.
- **Ingredients:** What is used in a food. Ingredients are listed in order by weight from highest to lowest.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size	**1 ½ cup (39g)**
Amount per serving	
Calories	**140**
	% Daily Value *
Total Fat 2.5g	**3%**
Saturated Fat 0.5g	**3%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 1g	
Monounsaturated Fat 1g	
Cholesterol 0mg	**0%**
Sodium 190mg	**8%**
Potassium 250mg	**6%**
Total Carbohydrate 29g	**11%**
Dietary Fiber 4g	**14%**
Soluble Fiber 2g	
Total Sugars 2g	
Incl. 1g Added Sugars	**2%**
Protein 5g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 130mg	10%
Iron 12.6mg	70%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Figure 1. Nutrition label

Potassium is used as a salt substitute. Products labeled “low salt,” or “low sodium” may have more potassium. Potassium levels may change if a food is fresh, cooked, or canned.

Low potassium food choices have less than 200 milligrams (mg) of potassium per serving. Eating a large amount of a low potassium food can make it a high potassium food.

High potassium food choices have more than 200 mg of potassium per serving. Eating a small amount of a high potassium food can make it a low potassium food.

Potassium in foods

Unless otherwise noted, a serving size of food in the table below is:

- ½ cup
- 1 small fruit
- 1 cup of leafy greens

Food Group	Lower Potassium Choices	Higher Potassium Choices

Vegetables	• Asparagus • Beans (green, wax, yellow) • Bean sprouts • Broccoli • Cabbage • Carrots • Cauliflower • Carrots • Celery • Cucumbers • Eggplants • Endive • Kale • Mustard greens • Peppers • Kale • Lettuce (all types) • Leeks • Mushrooms • Onions • Peas (green, sugar snap, snow peas) • Radishes (5) • Summer squash • Turnip	• Artichokes (1) • Avocado • Bamboo shoots (raw) • Beets (canned, fresh) • Brussels sprouts (fresh, frozen) • Chard (cooked) • Chinese cabbage/bok choy (cooked) • Potatoes (white, sweet, yams) • Parsnips • Pumpkin • Spinach (cooked, canned, frozen) • Squash (winter, acorn, butternut, rhubarb) • Tomatoes (raw, boiled, canned, purees, sauces) • Vegetable or tomato juice

Fruits	• Apple, applesauce • Apricot (1) • Berries- blackberries, blueberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries • Cherries • Clementine (1), mandarin orange, tangerine • Dried apples, blueberries, cherries, cranberries (3/4 cup) • Fruit cup: anu fruit, fruit cocktail • Grapes • Grapefruit (1/2) • Lemon and limes • Plum (1) • Pear • Watermelon (1 cup) • Fruit juice: apple, cranberry, grape, pineapple • Nectars: apricot, mango, papaya, peach, pear	• Bananas • Dried fruit (1/4 cup) such as apricots, dates, figs, prunes, and raisins • Kiwi (1) • Melon: cantaloupe, honeydew • Nectarine (1 medium) • Orange (fresh, 1 medium) • Papaya (1/2 medium) • Peach • Plantain • Pomegranate • Fruit juice: pomegranate, prune, orange, carrot

Grains	• Cereal (1 cup) • Oatmeal (1 cup) • Bread, whole grain, raisin, white (1 slice) • Pasta (whole grain and white) • Rice (white or brown)	• Bran cereals • Granola
Protein Foods	• Peanut butter (1 tablespoon) • Hummus (1/4 cup) • Tofu (3 ounces) • Vegetarian patty (2 ounces, size of ½ palm of hand)	• Legumes/Pulse: black, kidney, pinto or white beans, black-eyes peas, split peas, lentils, chickpeas • Beef, fish, and poultry (3 ounces, size of palm of hand) • Nuts (1/4 cup) • Soy: soy nuts, tofu (tempeh, edamame, roasted soy beans)

Dairy and Alternatives	• Rice, almond or oat dairy alternatives • Cream cheese (1 tablespoon) • Greek yogurt (plain or flavored, 4 ounces) • Natural cheese (blue, brie, cheddar, Swiss) (1 ounce) • Sour cream (1 tablespoon)	• Milk (8 ounces) • Soy milk • Cottage cheese (1 cup) • Coconut milk
Beverages	• Lemonade (8 ounces) • Tea (8 ounces, fresh brewed)	• Coconut water • Low sodium broths and soups (1 cup, ½ can, 1 packet, bouillon cube) • Bottled, instant tea

Talk with an MSK clinical dietitian-nutritionist (RDN)

If you have any questions or concerns about your diet while you're in the hospital, ask to see a clinical dietitian-nutritionist. Call 212-639-7312 to talk to or schedule an appointment with a clinical dietitian-nutritionist.

We recommend meeting with a clinical dietitian-nutritionist if your healthcare provider tells you to limit your potassium.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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