

Potassium and Your Kidneys

A practical guide to food choices and safety

Why does potassium matter?

Potassium helps nerves, muscles, and the heart work normally. When kidney function declines, potassium may build up in the blood. Both very high and very low potassium can be dangerous.

Not everyone with CKD needs a low-potassium diet. Follow the potassium goal recommended by your nephrologist or dietitian.

General strategies

- Pay attention to portion size.
- Choose more lower-potassium foods when restriction is needed.
- Drain and rinse canned fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid potassium-containing salt substitutes unless approved.
- Check labels and ingredient lists.
- Ask whether your medicines can affect potassium.

Call your care team promptly for

- New significant muscle weakness
- Persistent numbness or tingling
- Palpitations or an irregular heartbeat
- Unexplained severe fatigue

Food choices are about both the food and the portion

A small serving of a higher-potassium food may contain less potassium than a large serving of a moderate-potassium food. Your dietitian can help you build a plan around foods you actually enjoy.

Do not change prescribed potassium supplements, diuretics, ACE inhibitors, ARBs, or other medications without discussing it with your clinician.

Potassium in Foods

Examples to help with everyday choices

Often lower in potassium

- Apples, berries, grapes, pineapple
- Cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, lettuce
- Green beans, bell peppers, onions
- Rice, pasta, bread
- Eggs

Often higher in potassium

- Bananas, oranges/orange juice, avocado
- Potatoes and sweet potatoes
- Tomatoes/tomato products
- Spinach and other concentrated leafy greens
- Dried fruit
- Beans and lentils
- Many salt substitutes containing potassium chloride

Practical lower-potassium swaps

Instead of	Consider
Banana	Apple, berries, grapes or pineapple
Orange juice	Apple or cranberry-based beverage if appropriate
Large baked potato	Rice, pasta, or a smaller prepared potato portion
Tomato-heavy side	Cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, or green beans

Cooking tips

- Boiling and discarding cooking water can reduce potassium in some vegetables, but it does not make all foods low in potassium.
- Avoid using the cooking liquid in soups or gravies when you are trying to reduce potassium.
- Processed foods may contain potassium additives; ingredient lists can be helpful.

If your blood potassium is high, dietary changes may help, but treatment may also require medication changes or potassium-binding medicines. Follow your kidney team's plan.