

## Potassium: What If I Have Too Much or Not Enough?

### What is potassium?

Potassium is a mineral that helps the cells in your body work correctly. The World Health Organization recommends a diet rich in potassium for most healthy adults. You can get potassium from eating most fruits, vegetables, meats, and fish. Foods with a lot of potassium include lima beans, sunflower seeds, pistachios, potatoes, yams, dried fruits, avocados, bananas, spinach, soybeans, and seaweed. Some people with chronic kidney disease should eat a low-potassium diet. Talk to your doctor about your specific needs.

A list of common foods and the amount of potassium they contain is available at <https://www.nal.usda.gov/sites/www.nal.usda.gov/files/potassium.pdf>.

Lists of foods and dietary recommendations for people with chronic kidney disease are available at <https://www.kidney.org/atoz/content/potassium>.

### What can cause potassium to be too low?

You can lose too much potassium in urine or stool. This can happen by taking certain medicines, such as diuretics (“water pills” to treat high blood pressure), or if you have diarrhea or vomiting. Many people do not get enough potassium in their diets.

### What can cause potassium to be too high?

Certain medicines can cause high potassium levels. Some examples are angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors and angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs), which are used to treat high blood pressure. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen and naproxen, are another example. Kidney problems may also cause you to have too much potassium in your body.

### How do I know if I have potassium problems?

Your doctor can ask you questions about your health and measure potassium with a blood test. Sometimes other tests are used to help find the cause of the problem. Most people do not feel any different unless their potassium is very high or very low.

### How are potassium problems treated?

If a medicine is causing the problem, your doctor may tell you to stop taking it or to take a different one. For low potassium, you may need to take potassium supplements. If your potassium is too high, your doctor may give you medicine to help get rid of the extra.

If your potassium level is dangerously high or low or you feel ill, your doctor may tell you to go to the emergency room or stay in the hospital.

January 2023



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Adapted with permission from Viera AJ, Wouk N. Potassium disorders: hypokalemia and hyperkalemia. *Am Fam Physician*. 2015;92(6):487-495.

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