

Potassium

Potassium is a natural mineral found in the human body and in a wide variety of foods. It is one of the substances found in foods that maintain the body's internal balance of fluids and chemicals. The kidneys and heart also work to keep the balance.

Balance

The body must have both sodium and potassium to keep this balance. Sodium is found outside the cells. The typical American diet provides more sodium than needed and enough potassium. Potassium is found in fruits, meats, vegetables, dairy and other foods. It is also in salt substitutes. But some diseases and other changes can upset the body's natural balance of fluids and chemicals and lead to a potassium imbalance.

Not getting enough potassium from what you eat is not common, but a diet low in fresh fruits and vegetables makes it possible. A lack of potassium happens more often from large losses than from taking in too little. Dehydration, prolonged vomiting or diarrhea can cause a loss of potassium. Laxative abuse may also cause losses. The regular use of certain drugs can lead to reduced levels of potassium. This is very true for some diuretics or "water pills" used to treat high blood pressure.

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

Potassium is important in dealing with hypertension. This is true not only because of possible losses of potassium during treatment of hypertension but also because of potassium's actual help in the treatment and prevention of high blood pressure.

Evidence supports the idea that taking in high amounts of potassium from foods can help in the prevention and treatment of hypertension. Increased blood pressure can also start when enough potassium is not received. It is important to get adequate potassium, preferable from food sources. It is best to eat many fruits and

vegetables that will increase potassium intake to 3500 milligrams per day.

Sodium, the other partner in this balancing act, makes up 40% of table salt. Appetite for salt begins at infancy. We need very little salt to survive (1/2 teaspoon or 1,500 mg per day). Salt reduction has long been a part of the treatment of hypertension. But for people who are not salt sensitive, once high blood pressure develops, a moderate salt reduction alone will not lower the blood pressure to normal levels. Eating foods high in potassium can help. Potassium supplements or salt substitutes may be considered for those who have a hard time in cutting down the salt in their diets.

Just as too little potassium can lead to complications, so can too much potassium. If the kidneys and circulatory system (heart and blood vessels) are working properly, diet alone will not create a dangerously high level of potassium in the blood. This could occur in persons taking prescribed potassium supplements. Instructions on how to take the medication must be followed exactly.

Sources

Remember, potassium is found inside all living cells, both plant and animal. Because cells remain whole unless foods are processed, the richest sources of potassium are fresh foods of all kinds – especially fruits, vegetables and beans. Fruit have an added advantage since many of them are just about sodium-free.

Fresh foods also contain much more potassium than sodium. But most processed foods such as canned vegetables, ready-to-eat cereals and luncheon meats contain more sodium and less potassium. The important connection here is that people who eat many foods high in salt are often eating fewer of the fresh foods that are high in potassium at the same time. Sodium avoidance may help in two ways: (1) by lowering blood pressure in salt-sensitive people (2) indirectly raising potassium in all people.

The dietary reference intake is 4.700 milligrams. Recommendations can also be given using the measurement of millimoles. The terms of measurement may differ but the amounts of potassium are the same.

Daily potassium recommendation:

4,700 milligrams (4.7 grams) per day

Food	Portion	Potassium (mg)
Apricots, dried	10 lrg halves	470
Apricots, raw	3 medium	301
Apple, w/ skin	1 medium	159
Apple, w/o skin	1 medium	144
Asparagus, Cooked	6 spears	144
Avocado	½	680
Banana	1 lrg	503
Beef, lean, Round	3 oz	298
Beets, cooked	½ c slices	266
Bran flakes	1 c	137
Broccoli, raw	½ c, chopped	143
Broccoli, cooked	½ c	228
Broccoli, frozen	½ c	166
Cabbage, raw	½ c shredded	81
Cabbage, cooked	½ c cooked	134
Cauliflower, raw	½ c	178
Cauliflower, Cooked	½ c	200
Cauliflower, Frozen	½ c	125
Cantaloupe	½ of 5" melon	682
Carrot, raw	1 medium	233
Carrot, cooked	½ c slices	177
Cocoa, dried	2 tablespoons	164
Coffee	6 fluid oz	65
Dates, pitted	10 medium	518
Figs, raw	1 large	126
Ham, cured	3 oz	199
Green beans, Cooked	½ c	185
Great Northern Beans, cooked	1 c	692
Kale/collards, Cooked	½ c	148
Kidney beans, Cooked	½ c	713
Lentils, cooked	1 c	731
Lettuce, Romaine Raw	½ c, shredded	81
Lentils, cooked	1 c	731

If you wish to convert to one term of measurement use the following formulas:

$$\text{milligrams to millimoles} - \frac{\text{milligrams}}{39.1} = \text{millimoles}$$

$$\text{millimoles to milligrams} - \text{millimoles} \times 39.1 = \text{mg}$$

Some of the best dietary sources of potassium are shown on the following table.

Food	Portion	Potassium (mg)
Lettuce, Romaine Raw	½ c, shredded	81
Lettuce, Iceburg Raw	1 leaf	32
Limas, mature Cooked	1 c	729
Baby Limas, Frozen	½ c	370
Onion, raw	½ c, chopped	125
Orange	1 medium	250
Peaches, dried	10 lrg halves	1,378
Peach, raw	1 medium	171
Peanut Butter	1 tablespoon	100
Peas, green, Cooked	½ c	217
Pinto Beans	1 c	800
Potato, baked, W/ skin	1 medium	844
Potato, baked W/o skin	1 medium	610
Prunes, dried	10 medium	448
Raisins	½ c	553
Salmon, canned, Pink	3 oz	425
Sardines, canned	3 oz	477
Spinach, raw	½ c, chopped	156
Spinach, cooked	½ c	419
Sweet potato, Baked	1 medium	397
Tomato, raw	1 medium	300
Tomato juice	6 fluid oz	413
Tuna, canned	3 ½ oz	276
Turkey	3 oz	312
Watermelon	1 c	186
Whole wheat Bread	1 slice	44
Winter squash Baked	½ c, chopped	445
Winter squash Boiled	½ c, mashed	300
Yogurt, Yoplait Lowfat	6 fluid oz	370
Zucchini, boiled	½ c, slices	161