

Kidney disease guidelines to manage and treat high potassium

When you have kidney disease, your kidneys cannot remove extra potassium in the right way, and too much potassium can stay in your blood. High potassium or hyperkalemia is a serious condition that may be life threatening. If you are diagnosed with chronic kidney disease, you may be at increased risk for high potassium.

The only way to know if you have high potassium is to have a blood test. You will need to monitor this closely with your healthcare team through routine lab work and a treatment plan.



Kidney disease experts write guidelines based on research to help health care professionals choose the right treatment plan for people living with kidney disease.

If you have high potassium, the guidelines recommend that your provider create a personalized plan to manage and treat high potassium based on your stage of chronic kidney disease, blood test results and your other treatments. **This resource includes tips to help you follow your plan to manage high potassium.**

If you are at risk of high potassium, consider taking these steps:

- 1 Talk to your provider about high potassium
- 2 Know your potassium numbers
- 3 Understand why it is important to keep potassium at a healthy level
- 4 If you have high potassium, your provider will create a customized treatment plan



Your risk of having high potassium is even higher if any of these are true for you:

- You take **certain medicines to control your blood pressure**, such as ACE inhibitors (angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors) or ARBs (angiotensin receptor blockers).
- You have **diabetes**.

1 Talk to your provider about high potassium

Potassium is a mineral and an electrolyte that mostly comes from the food you eat. It helps your nerves and muscles work right, especially your heart. **Ask your provider these questions:**


- What is my potassium level?
- What should my potassium level be?
- How often should I have a blood test to check my potassium level?
- Why do I have high potassium? What caused it?
- What changes can I make to manage high potassium? Do I need to take any medicines to treat high potassium?
 - What are the possible side effects of these medicines?
 - How long will I need to take these medicines?
- What should I do if I have symptoms of high potassium?

2 Know your potassium numbers

Your provider will check your potassium numbers regularly through a blood test. The test is often part of a group of routine blood tests called an electrolyte panel.

What do my potassium blood test results mean?

- **Healthy** potassium levels typically range between 3.5-5.0 mmol/L
- **High potassium** levels are over 5.0 mmol/L
 - Mild to moderate high potassium is 5.0-5.9 mmol/L
 - Severe high potassium is 6.0-6.4 mmol/L

 **If your potassium is 5.0 mmol/L or higher**, talk with your provider about a treatment plan to help lower your potassium levels.

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Your provider will recommend what your potassium level should be based on your other lab values, current medicines, medical history and overall health goals.

3 Understand why it's important to keep potassium at a healthy level

Having too much potassium in your blood can be dangerous. It can cause your heart to beat irregularly, which can cause a heart attack. You may not feel symptoms of high potassium, which is why regular blood tests are so important.



If you have trouble breathing or think there could be a problem with your heart, **call 911 for emergency help.**

Common symptoms of high potassium may include:

- Feeling tired or weak
- Feeling sick to the stomach (nausea)
- Muscle pains or cramps
- Trouble breathing, unusual heartbeat or chest pain

Common signs of heart attack are:

- Feelings of pressure, pain or squeezing in your chest or arms
- Stomach pain or nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Breaking into a cold sweat
- Sudden feelings of dizziness

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If you have high potassium, your provider will create a personalized treatment plan

Your treatment plan may include:

Your provider reviews all your medicines with you

Your provider may tell you to stop taking certain medicines that can raise your potassium level, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen.

Your provider has you limit the amount of potassium you eat

Your provider may have you see a dietitian to create a food and fluid plan that is lower in potassium.

Your provider may have you take medicines to lower your potassium levels

These medicines may include:

- A **diuretic (water pill)**, which will help your kidneys make more urine to remove potassium – your provider may recommend this if you have high blood pressure.
- **Sodium bicarbonate**, which puts salt in your body to help move potassium from your blood into your cells – your provider may recommend this if you have metabolic acidosis (buildup of acid in your body).

If your potassium level is still high, your provider may have you take a medicine called a **potassium binder**. It sticks to the potassium in your body to prevent it from getting into your blood.

If you take potassium binders, you may have more freedom to eat higher potassium and heart-healthy foods you enjoy.

Your provider may lower or pause your ACEi or ARB medicine

If you take an ACEi or ARB and your potassium level is still high after taking the above steps, your provider may lower your dose or pause your medicine.

This is typically the last step your provider will take to lower your potassium level because these medicines play a large role in controlling your blood pressure and keeping your kidneys healthy.



Tips to follow a low potassium food and fluid plan

A dietitian can help you create a low potassium food and fluid plan that is right for you. **A low potassium eating plan is between 2,000 – 3,000mg of potassium per day.** As an example, spread out over three meals, this may include anywhere between 500-800mg of potassium per meal, leaving room for snacks and drinks through the day.







Tips to follow a low potassium food and fluid plan:

- Drain juice, syrup and liquids from canned fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid salt substitutes and other seasonings with potassium.
- Read labels on packaged foods and avoid foods with potassium chloride.
- Boil your vegetables instead of steaming or microwaving them – this lets some of the potassium seep into the water that you can then pour out.

Questions to ask your dietitian:

- How can I read food labels to identify high potassium foods?
- How much fluid should I be drinking?
- How much potassium should I eat in a day?

For recipes, visit [KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas](https://www.kidneyfund.org/BeyondBananas)

Choose these low potassium foods (150mg or less per serving)	Limit these high potassium foods (more than 250mg of potassium per serving)
 Fruit Apples, berries, grapes, clementines, mandarins	Bananas, kiwis, cantaloupe, honeydew
 Vegetables Green beans, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce	Dried beans, Brussels sprout, spinach
 Dairy Pudding made with nondairy creamer, sherbet or sorbet, oat, soy, rice and nut milks, coconut milk	Pudding made with milk, yogurt, ice cream or frozen yogurt, coconut water
 Snacks Unsalted popcorn, pretzels, rice cakes	Nuts or seeds, potato chips
 Sweets Vanilla or lemon-flavored desserts, apple or berry pies, cheesecake	Chocolate desserts, chocolate bars, desserts with coconut or nuts
 Drinks Apple, cranberry or grape juice, lemonade, ginger beer	Orange or prune juice, coffee, beer



To learn more about high potassium, visit [KidneyFund.org/Potassium](https://www.kidneyfund.org/Potassium)

