

**beyond  
bananas+**

Potassium and your kidneys



# Potassium and kidney disease



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The kidneys work as filters for your body. Their job is to remove extra potassium, fluid, and waste from your body through your urine. Your kidneys help keep the right amount of potassium and other nutrients in your body.

Potassium is a mineral your body needs to keep your muscles and heart working. Your body gets potassium from what you eat and drink. When your kidneys are not working well, the extra potassium goes back into your bloodstream instead of out of the body.



## What is hyperkalemia?

Too much potassium in the blood is a condition called **hyperkalemia** (high-per-kuh-LEE-mee-uh) that can be dangerous. Normal potassium levels help to keep your heart beating normally. Having too much potassium in the blood can change the way your heart beats, which can cause irregular heartbeats or even death.

If you have hyperkalemia, it is important to lower your potassium level. Your doctor may recommend you lower potassium in your diet, or change medicines that might cause hyperkalemia, and/or take medicine called a potassium binder.



# How will I know if I have hyperkalemia?

The only way to know if you have hyperkalemia is to have a blood test. Generally, your potassium level is normal if it is between 3.7 and 5.2 mEq/L. However, different labs have different ranges for normal levels so talk to your doctor about what your test results mean.



It is important to remember your results only show the amount of potassium that was in your blood at the time you had the test. This is because your potassium level depends on:

- how much of it you are getting in what you eat and drink each day
- if you are taking certain medicines that can raise potassium levels
- if you are taking your potassium binders correctly, and
- how well your kidneys are working.

Therefore, if you get a normal result on the day of your blood test, you may still be at high risk for hyperkalemia if you have kidney disease. Your doctor will tell you if you need to track your potassium intake every day and make controlling your potassium levels a long-term goal.

Most of the time, hyperkalemia does not show any signs. However, common symptoms of hyperkalemia are:



Unusual heartbeat



Chest pain



Feeling tired or weak



Muscle weakness, cramping, twitching, or pain



Nausea



Trouble breathing



Vomiting

# How is hyperkalemia managed?

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## Lower your potassium intake

Changing what you eat can help you manage your potassium levels. Lowering the amount of potassium in your diet may prevent potassium from building up in your blood. Your body needs potassium, so you cannot stay away from it completely. After your doctor or dietitian tells you how much potassium you should have each day:

- **Eat lower-potassium foods**—foods with no more than 250 mg (milligrams) of potassium per serving.
- **Check serving sizes and control your portions.** Even foods low in potassium can become high-potassium foods if you eat a larger portion.
- **Carefully track the amount of potassium in what you eat *and* drink.** Many drinks, healthy foods and salt substitutes can be high in potassium too.

If you have Medicare or Medicaid insurance, your visit to a dietitian is covered! If not, call your insurance company to find out if you qualify for medical nutrition therapy (MNT).



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## **Take potassium binders as directed by your doctor**

Hyperkalemia is sometimes treated with medicine called a potassium binder. Binders stick to the potassium in your body and stop some of it from going into your bloodstream. Potassium binders can help keep potassium levels in the normal range with continued use as directed by your doctor.

The medicine is a powder that you mix with water and drink daily. Talk to your doctor to find out if a potassium binder is an option for you. Potassium binders can have some side effects. You should discuss the side effects with your doctor and explore new treatment options that might be available. But do not stop taking the medicine unless your doctor says so.

**Hyperkalemia is potentially a serious condition that you must treat.**

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## **Certain medicines can raise potassium levels**

Your doctor may change the dose of these medicines to keep your potassium level in the normal range. Ask your doctor whether you need to change any of the medicines you are taking that might raise potassium or whether you need to take other medicines to help keep the potassium levels from going too high.

# How can I track potassium?

Once you know how much potassium you need every day, you can plan your meals to make sure you are getting the right amount. Remember, even just one food item can cause your potassium level to go up! To find out how much potassium is in what you eat and drink:

- **Read food labels.** Some labels on packaged foods and drinks tell you how many milligrams of potassium it has.
- **Check the ingredients list** on packaged foods and drinks to see if the word 'potassium' or an abbreviation for potassium (K or K+) is listed.
- **Download the Beyond Bananas Potassium Food Guide** at [KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas](https://KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas) for a list of low-, medium- and high-potassium fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy products, and other foods and drinks.
- **Talk to your dietitian.**

 Plan ahead if you know you will be eating a meal or snack that is high in potassium. For example, if you are going out for dinner and know it will be hard to measure potassium, plan to eat low-potassium meals for breakfast and lunch.

**To start tracking how much potassium you eat at each meal, download the Beyond Bananas Potassium Tracker at [KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas](https://KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas)**

Remember, YOU have the power to control your potassium levels by taking your medicines and tracking how much potassium goes into your body every day!

## Resources

Visit **KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas** to learn more about hyperkalemia and download tools to support kidney-friendly eating:

**MY DAILY POTASSIUM TRACKER**

Example	DATE	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	TOTAL
Food	2/22	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
Medication		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
Kidney Binder		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
<b>M</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
<b>T</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
<b>W</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
<b>T</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
<b>F</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
<b>S</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20
<b>S</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	0 to 20

**The Potassium Tracker** can help you get in the habit of tracking your potassium intake and taking your binders.

**Potassium Food Guide**

Low potassium	Medium potassium	High potassium
Apple	Apple	Apple
Banana	Banana	Banana
Bread	Bread	Bread
Cheese	Cheese	Cheese
Chicken	Chicken	Chicken
Eggs	Eggs	Eggs
Fish	Fish	Fish
Fruit	Fruit	Fruit
Grains	Grains	Grains
Meat	Meat	Meat
Milk	Milk	Milk
Nuts	Nuts	Nuts
Vegetables	Vegetables	Vegetables
Yogurt	Yogurt	Yogurt

**The Potassium Food Guide** can help you make the right food choices with its list of low-, medium-, and high- potassium food and drink items from multiple food groups.

# Questions to ask your doctor



1. What is my potassium level?

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2. What should my potassium level be?

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3. How often should I have a blood test to check my potassium level?

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4. How much potassium should I have each day?

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5. (If you have hyperkalemia) What is the right treatment for me?

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AstraZeneca is the sole supporter of the Beyond Bananas campaign.



[KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas](https://KidneyFund.org/BeyondBananas)