

# Potassium Connection

**R**ecommended daily consumption of potassium is 3500 to 4700 mg daily. Vegetarians who consume a lot of vegetables, legumes, and fruits probably get plenty of potassium in their diet. Many plant based foods are not only rich in potassium, they are also naturally low in sodium, both of these can help to keep blood pressure in a normal range.

Dairy products, and fish are also good source of potassium.

**STORY OF SALT SUBSTITUTE** Study published in New England journal of medicine a few years back, involving over 21,000 people living in rural China, many of whom had high blood pressure and history of stroke, 50% of them used regular salt while the other half used salt substitute that contained 25% potassium chloride and 75% sodium chloride.

After a follow up of about 4.7 years the risk stroke was 14% lower in those using the salt substitute. In the United States, about 75% of the sodium in the average diet comes from foods that are prepared elsewhere, namely processed foods and meals from supermarkets and restaurants.

Many entrées at restaurants chains contain more than 2300 mg of sodium-the recommended limit for an entire day's worth of salt.

**NATURAL VS ADDED POTASSIUM** Eating more fresh and unprocessed food is a smarter strategy of getting your potassium, rather than salt substitute that contain 50 or 100 percent potassium chloride. Food manufacturers already use potassium chloride in some products ( such as bread, cereal, cheese, and processed meats) to replace the percentage of the regular sodium chloride they would normally use.

Potassium salt has some bitter, metallic flavor that sometimes limits how much people will tolerate.

**POTASSIUM AND THE KIDNEY** There is another reason to be cautious about supplementing food supply with potassium. High potassium levels called Hyperkalemia can trigger dangerous heart rhythm disorders and in extreme cases can cause cardiac arrest. Fortunately, hyperkalemia or high potassium levels isn't something most people need to worry about.

Most of the people who have normal kidneys shouldn't have a problem, since kidneys filter excess potassium out of the body through urine. Advanced age, diabetes and heart failure may impair kidney function, and also certain medications can cause the kidneys to retain potassium. These medications are often used to treat high blood pressure and heart failure.

These include, so called potassium sparing diuretics. ( like epleranone or Inspra, Spiranolactone or Aldactone), and Triamterene ( Dyrinium, Maxzide). Two classes of drugs, used to treat high blood pressure and heart failure can also elevate potassium levels.

These include ACE Inhibitor such as Lisinopril( Prinivil,Zestril), Ramipril and Angiotensin receptor blockers such as Losartan ( Cozaar) and Valsartan ( Diovan) also can cause potassium elevation in some people. A blood test called basic metabolic panel is usually done 2 to 4 weeks after people start taking these medications can detect abnormal potassium levels.

Once you are on a stable drug regimen, and your doctor has confirmed your kidney function is normal, you can have your potassium checked on a yearly basis. But to be safe, if you are taking one of these drugs it is better to avoid salt substitutes containing potassium chloride.

It's also a good idea to check with your doctor if you can eat more potassium-rich foods, although the risk of hyperkalemia from food is likely very small. Commonly used painkillers called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents, such as ibuprofen ( Advil) and Aleve( Naproxen) can also cause high potassium level more so when used chronically.

Common symptoms of high potassium level include muscle weakness, fatigue, nausea, tingling or numbness in the body, chest pain, shortness of breath, slow and irregular heartbeat, and in extreme cases, cardiac arrest.

Low potassium level called hypokalemia can also occur. Diuretics, like hydrochlorothiazide, chlorthalidone, Furosemide( Lasix), Bumtenide( Bumex), Torsemide can cause low potassium level. Symptoms of low potassium include muscle weakness, fatigue, muscle cramps, or spasms, constipation, cardiac irregularities.

GOOD SOURCES OF POTASSIUM -Sweet Potato -Soybeans -Cantaloupe -Banana, grapes, orange, apricot -spinach -Tomatoes

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