



National  
Kidney  
Foundation®

## HYPERKALEMIA AND KIDNEY DISEASE: IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

### WHAT IS HYPERKALEMIA?

- A medical problem in which you have too much potassium in your blood.
- Potassium is an important nutrient. It helps your nerves and muscles, including the heart, work properly. But too much potassium can cause health problems, including serious heart problems.

### WHY AM I AT RISK?

- Kidney disease can put you at risk. Healthy kidneys control the amount of potassium in your blood. They balance the amount taken in with the amount lost in urine. If kidneys do not work well, they may not be able to remove extra potassium, which can build up and cause problems. Common causes of kidney disease include diabetes and high blood pressure.
- If you have kidney disease, eating high-potassium foods can put you at risk.
- Uncontrolled diabetes or heart failure can put you at risk.
- Some drugs can put you at risk. Tell your healthcare provider about all the drugs you take, including any blood pressure medicines, over-the-counter products, antibiotics, nutritional supplements, salt substitutes, and herbals.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT?

- Many people will not feel any symptoms. High potassium is often found during routine blood tests. Some people may experience muscle weakness, numbness, tingling, paralysis, nausea, or tiredness. Treatment may include:
  - A low-potassium diet
  - Reducing or changing certain medications, as instructed by your healthcare provider
  - Water pills (diuretics) or potassium binders to help remove extra potassium, if needed
- In some people, hyperkalemia can become life-threatening. It can happen very suddenly and cause a serious heart problem which requires emergency treatment at a hospital or clinic. Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you have:
  - An irregular heartbeat
  - Heart palpitations
  - Shortness of breath
  - Chest pain
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting