

Q. I've heard that eating more potassium-rich foods can help control blood pressure. What foods contain potassium?

A. A diet low in potassium and high in sodium can be one of the factors contributing to high blood pressure. Potassium helps maintain the body's water balance. It is also involved in nerve function and muscle control, and helps lower high blood pressure. Getting adequate potassium is just as important as lowering sodium intake to prevent or correct high blood pressure.

Most Americans do not get enough potassium in their diets. New recommendations from the Institute of Medicine suggest eating 4,700 mg of potassium daily. But the average American eats less than half of that. Athletes might need more to replace the potassium used by their muscles or lost through sweat during prolonged exercise.



Low potassium is called *hypokalemia*. It can cause muscle cramping, slow reflexes, slow digestion, and if severely low, cardiovascular irregularities. According to the National Institutes of Health, possible causes of hypokalemia include diuretics, diarrhea, eating disorders, and consuming large amounts of licorice.

Eating foods high in potassium can help you prevent these symptoms and may help bring down your blood pressure. One cup of orange juice or a banana can replace the potassium lost during 1-2 hours of hard exercise. Sport drinks are poor sources of potassium.

Aim for 4,700 milligrams of potassium each day. You can quickly see why you need to eat 8-10 servings of fruits and vegetables daily to reach this goal.

Fruits and vegetables that are good sources of potassium	Serving Size	Potassium (mg)
Apple, fresh	1	239
Apricots, fresh	1 cup	427
Artichokes, cooked	1	343
Asparagus	8 spears	268
Avocado	½ medium	345
Bananas	1 large	487
Beans, cooked	1 cup	611
Brussels sprouts, cooked	½ cup	247
Cantaloupe, diced	1 cup	427
Carrots, cooked slices	½ cup	247
Celery	1 stalk	166
Chinese cabbage, cooked	1 cup	631
Dates	2	334
Granola	1 cup	659
Greens (beet, collards, etc.), cooked	½ cup	654
Honeydew, diced	1 cup	388
Kiwi	1	215
Mango	1	323
Oatmeal, cooked	1 cup	164
Orange	1 medium	232

Fruits and vegetables that are good sources of potassium	Serving Size	Potassium (mg)
Orange juice	1 cup	496
Papayas	1 medium	781
Plantains, cooked	1 cup	716
Peanuts	35	169
Potatoes, baked	1 medium	943
Prunes	3	210
Raisins, mini-snack ½-ounce box	2	212
Soybeans, cooked	1 cup	886
Spinach, cooked	½ cup	420
Sunflower seeds	½ cup	452
Sweet potato	1 medium	347
Tomato	1 medium	292
Winter squash, cooked	1 cup	896

Other foods		
Chicken breast	3 ounces	218
Milk	1 cup	366
Salmon	3 ounces	429

Sources: Institute of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, American Heart Association, USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference 22, Colorado State University Extension.

