

## Potassium: An Important Mineral for Our Health

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Potassium is much too scarce in the American diet, yet it is the 7<sup>th</sup> most plentiful mineral on earth. If it weren't for potassium, nerve impulses wouldn't travel and muscles wouldn't contract. Research over the past decade indicates that potassium can lower blood pressure and possibly the risk of a stroke. It is also believed to lower the risk of kidney stones and prevent bone loss.

According to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the more potassium-rich foods in our diet the better. Men and women 14 years of age and older should be getting at least 4,700 milligrams (mg) each day *from food*. On average, men and women are getting just over half that amount. Americans eat an abundance of processed food, which is lower in potassium. The more processing a food goes through, the lower the potassium content and the higher the sodium content. An example of this would be the majority of frozen convenience foods and many canned vegetables – low potassium and high sodium. Here are some of the benefits of getting enough potassium in your diet:

- **Lowering blood pressure (hypertension):** An increase of potassium in the diet tends to mute the effects of sodium in the diet, which can contribute to high blood pressure. While increasing potassium won't be enough to *control* hypertension, it will help to lower it and decrease your risk of a stroke. A diet rich in potassium can also reduce your risk of developing hypertension.
- **Protecting against kidney stones:** More potassium in the diet can bind up the calcium that may collect in the kidneys, making stones less likely to form.
- **Slowing bone loss:** Through metabolism, potassium is used to neutralize acidity in the body that occurs naturally through various body processes. If the body can't neutralize the acid with the available potassium, it will "steal" calcium carbonate from the bones to balance the acidity. That leads to bone loss.
- **Here are some potassium-rich foods:**

Potato (1)	940 mg	Sweet Potato (1)	540 mg
Banana (1)	490 mg	Acorn squash (1/2 c)	450 mg
Salmon (3 oz.)	390 mg	Cantaloupe (1/4 melon)	370 mg
Milk (1 c)	370 mg	Watermelon (2 c)	320 mg
Pork (3 oz.)	310 mg	Pistachios (50)	300 mg
Beef (3 oz.)	270 mg	Orange (1)	230 mg

Can a healthy person get too much potassium from food? The answer is no. Those who have any kind of kidney disease or are on certain high blood pressure medications shouldn't increase potassium-rich foods until they talk with their doctor. Remember, potassium supplements can be toxic to anyone. An irregular heartbeat is the most serious side effect. Don't take potassium supplements without a doctor's approval other than what may be in a typical multivitamin and mineral supplement.