



In Sunday leader

Potassium Could Be A Life-Saver Or A Killer

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Where do you find potassium rich foods and fruits, knowing potassium-rich foods consumed help support healthy blood pressure and many other benefits? They prevent strokes, heart and kidney disorders, anxiety and stress, as well as enhanced muscle strength, metabolism, water balance, electrolyte functions and nervous system. It is known that unprocessed foods are higher in potassium, so eating such food may give us the adequate daily requirement of potassium.

If your blood investigations find that this essential electrolyte mineral is low, you will be recommended to replace potassium by eating fruits such as oranges and bananas. Other foods rich in potassium include: milk, yogurt, prunes, sweet potatoes, baked potatoes with skin, beet-roots, Brussel sprouts, peanuts and seeds like flax, sunflower, carrot juice, tuna, soy beans and so on and the list goes much further, including tomato paste, watermelon and salmon.

Potassium is the third most abundant mineral in our body and it is a powerful mineral in improving health. Foods rich in potassium can lower the risk of heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure as mentioned earlier. Without adequate potassium in your blood the heart muscles may not work efficiently to regulate the blood pressure. In potassium deficiency one could expect early signs such as abnormal heart rhythms and palpitations, constipation, fatigue, and muscle damage or tingling, spasms and general weakness. The heart rate slows down and may stop working.

Other bad effects include inactive reflexes common among older people, anaemia and severe headaches. They may also experience high blood pressure, pain in their intestines, swelling in their glands and diabetes as a side effect of potassium deficiency.

Therefore, you should not underestimate the importance of potassium in your daily diet plan. Check your electrolytes annually when you go to your doctor for other tests.

Reduced potassium in your blood is called 'hypokalaemia'. Commonly this occurs among patients taking certain diuretics for hypertension and heart disease, causing loss of both potassium and sodium. Doctors will prescribe potassium tablets such as 'slow K' to replenish lost potassium, or may prescribe potassium conserving tablets to lose only sodium. Severe vomiting and diarrhoea are other common causes of hypokalaemia.

Those at risk of this deficiency are those who have undergone bariatric surgery for obesity, eating disorders, alcoholism and AIDS. The normal levels of potassium range from 3.6 to about 5.2 millimoles per litre. Anything higher is quite common in chronic renal deficiency, or lower and due to any causes mentioned earlier can be life threatening.

It was Karl Pilkington, the grumpy friend of comedian Ricky Gervais who spread the story that eating over six bananas can kill you. He knew bananas have plenty of potassium, so he made that imaginary story to excite the audience. It is true that if you consume foods including fruits containing high doses of potassium in excess can cause electrolyte imbalances, but the body regulation process then comes into remedial action. Potassium is found within the cells and too much of it becomes toxic to cause the intra-cellular damage.

It would be impossible to overdose on bananas until you eat over 400 at a time. Adults should consume about 3,500mg of potassium per day, according to the UK's National Health Service. The average banana weighing 125g: contains about 450mg of potassium, meaning a healthy person can consume about seven bananas before reaching the recommended level.

Chronic renal insufficiency

Those people who suffer from chronic renal disease due to toxic damage or diabetes should keep away from foods containing high potassium content, such as dark green vegetables and certain fruits. There was one case of dialysis where the person concerned had a heart attack after eating too many tomatoes- another fruit rich in potassium. When the potassium level in your blood is high the condition is referred to as Hyperkalaemia. Therefore, if your kidneys do not function well you need to see a dietician for advice on what foods you should not consume.

Brain functions

High levels of potassium help more oxygen to reach the brain, and stimulate neural activities and increasing cognitive function.

Cramps

Muscle cramps in the night could be due to low levels of potassium in your blood. Eat a banana daily to prevent such cramps. Remember many ailments in your body could be due to abnormal levels of potassium, either low or too high levels. As much as you are worried about your cholesterol levels in your blood, take notice of your potassium levels, too

