Dear Alice,

What foods are rich in potassium besides bananas?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Limiting yourself to bananas would be, well, bananas! This popular yellow fruit is *a-pealing* (get it?) due to its high potassium levels (one medium banana has about 422 milligrams), but it’s certainly not the only option in the pantry.

Getting right down to it, the top five sources of potassium are [drum roll, please]:

- One small baked potato with skin
- One cup of prune juice
- One-fourth cup of tomato paste
- One-half cup of white beans
- One-half cup of low- or non-fat plain yogurt

List adapted from the [United States Department of Agriculture’s Dietary Guidelines for Americans](http://goaskalice.columbia.edu).

Getting enough potassium means that your body can adequately maintain the balance of fluids and electrolytes inside your cells. It also plays a role in normalizing blood pressure, muscle contraction, and the transmission of nerve impulses? all pretty crucial functions for your bod. The good news is that there are plenty of fresh, whole foods available that can supply you with an abundance of the essential mineral and give you plenty of energy for monkey business!

So, how much of this mineral is recommended? The Adequate Intake (AI) for adults is currently 4,700 milligrams per day. AI refers to an amount of a nutrient that is suitable for most people, but also means that some people may be fine with getting slightly less than the AI amount. This may seem like a lot, but rest assured, there are many food sources that have claim to potassium-rich fame. In fact, if you’re eating a diet rich in fruits (such as kiwi, cantaloupe, & apricots), vegetables (particularly broccoli, potatoes with their skin, tomatoes, & lima beans), milk, and protein (including fish such as cod & salmon, chicken, nuts, & soy products), you’ll satisfy your potassium AI. To put it in perspective, a meal consisting of cod,
spinach, white beans, and one small baked potato satisfies nearly half of your daily requirement!

Now that you know a bit more about potassium-rich foods, you may be curious to know what can happen when you don't have enough of the stuff. Potassium levels can drop while sweating, dieting, using diuretics or laxatives, vomiting, or during bouts of diarrhea. When your potassium levels drop severely, your body can no longer detect the need for water. Severe losses can result in heart arrhythmias, confusion, nerve damage, and paralysis, while generally low potassium intake can worsen glucose intolerance, increase metabolic acidity, accelerate calcium bone loss, and increase the likelihood of developing kidney stones. Muscle weakness, cramping, and/or nausea may also indicate a potassium deficiency.

All this to say, eating a well-balanced diet rich in fresh, whole foods is your best bet for getting plenty of potassium for the average person. Unless under the direction of a medical professional, potassium supplements are not recommended. It's also good to note that some folks may need to lower their potassium intake, such as those with kidney disease and those who take certain medications. If you're concerned about whether or not your getting enough (or too much) in your diet, enlisting the help of a registered dietitian or health care provider may be in order.

Hope you got the information you were looking for... and even more. Good luck harnessing the power of potassium!

Alice!

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