

Foods plentiful in potassium ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What foods are rich in potassium besides bananas?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Limiting yourself to bananas as your potassium source would be, well, bananas! This popular yellow fruit is *ap-peel-ing* (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. It's critical that you get the recommended amounts of potassium in your diet, but you can be creative about how you get there.

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 cup carrot juice
- One cup passion fruit juice
- A quarter cup of tomato paste

List adapted from the United States Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines for Americans

^[2].

Potassium is a mineral ^[3] that helps your body conduct a number of critical functions. This mineral is also an electrolyte that plays a role in normalizing blood pressure, muscle contraction, and the transmission of nerve impulses — all pretty crucial functions for your body. There's also some evidence that shows potassium helps your cells access nutrients and buffers against some negative effects of sodium in the body. 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? Adequate Intake (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. The AI for potassium in adults is currently 4,700 milligrams (mg) per day. 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, and apricots), vegetables (particularly broccoli, potatoes with their skin, tomatoes, and lima beans), milk, and protein (including fish such as cod and salmon, chicken, nuts, and 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 due to sweating, inadequate nutrition, diuretic or laxative use, vomiting, or bouts of diarrhea. When your potassium levels drop severely, your body isn't able to balance water levels as effectively. Low potassium levels may cause symptoms such as fatigue, muscle damage, tingling or numbness, constipation, or heart arrhythmias. Muscle weakness, cramping, or nausea may also indicate a potassium deficiency. In severe cases it can lead to paralysis. 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 aren't 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 you're 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 potential of potassium!

Alice!

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Published date:

Jul 21, 2000

Last reviewed on:

Jul 21, 2017

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