

Potassium

Description

Potassium is a mineral that the human body needs to function properly. Staff members take blood samples to check the amount of potassium in the body. If the level is too high or too low, the staff may make changes to medicines or fluids that the patient is receiving.

Hypokalemia (not enough potassium in the blood)

Hypokalemia can occur:

- If there is a sudden increase in the amount of fluid received;
- When you are taking certain medicines;
- If your kidneys are not working well; or
- If you have a loss of body fluids from extended vomiting, diarrhea, or NG drainage.

Medicines that may cause a decrease in the blood potassium level are diuretics (water pills), insulin, and amphotericin B.

The staff can give you potassium to increase the amount of this mineral in the blood. It is available in these forms:

- 10-mg and 20-mg tablets (Micro-K[®] or K-Dur[®])
- A liquid taken by mouth
- A powder (Neutra Phos[®])
- A clear liquid given by vein (IV)

Special instructions

- Micro-K[®] capsules can be opened and the contents sprinkled on food. Do not dissolve in liquid.
- K-Dur[®] tablets cannot be crushed or cut in half. They may be dissolved in 5ml of water.
- Neutra Phos[®] packets must be dissolved in at least 30 ml (2 tablespoons) of liquid.
- Please talk to the doctor or nurse if you think you are having symptoms of hypokalemia. If you are in the local area, call 595-3300. If you are outside the Memphis area, dial toll-free 1-866-2STJUDE (1-866-278-5833), and press 0 once the call is connected.

This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Our aim is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education. Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.

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Hyperkalemia (too much potassium in the blood)

Hyperkalemia can occur:

- If your kidneys are not working well;
- When you are taking certain medications; or
- If you have tumor lysis syndrome (a fast killing of cancer cells).

Medicines that may cause an increase in blood potassium are triamterene, spironolactone, and albuterol. Blood pressure lowering agents called ACE inhibitors can also cause an increase in potassium. These include captopril, enalapril, benazepril, and lisinopril.

To decrease potassium in the blood, staff members can give you sodium polystyrene sulfonate (Kayexalate[®]), a cherry-flavored liquid.

Possible side effects for hyperkalemia

- Muscle weakness
- Changes in the heart causing abnormal beating

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