

LABEL DETECTIVE

By nutritionist
Catherine
Saxelby

Why you need to care about POTASSIUM

This mineral is critical for a healthy heart and nervous system, but you won't always find it on nutrition labels. Here's a primer!



What's good about it?

Potassium is essential for good health. It helps your muscles and heart

to function. And without the right amount, our heart and nervous system won't work properly. Another benefit is that potassium, along with magnesium, preserves bone calcium, helping you avoid weak bones in later life.

So where can I find it listed on the pack?

Unfortunately, potassium was taken off information panels a few years ago when labels were shortened. Today it only appears if a manufacturer claims a food is a "good source of potassium", or if they are marketing a product that's low in salt. That's because studies show an effective way to reduce blood pressure is to eat foods low in sodium and high in

potassium. So, on items such as no-added-salt tomato paste, sardines, chickpeas or baked beans you'll see the potassium listed on the nutrition panel.

How much do I need?

Women need 2800mg a day while men need more – 3800mg per day. Children need less, as they have a lower body weight.

Vegetables and fruit are your best sources, so aim to eat large serves.

Potassium levels are highest in leafy green vegetables such as spinach and kale, and also in potato, avocado, cucumber, zucchini, tomato and pumpkin.

Bananas and dried fruit such as apricots or raisins are also great sources. You'll even get moderate amounts from reduced-fat milk, meat, fish and legumes including beans, chickpeas and lentils.

How can I get enough?

Many of us associate potassium with bananas (which each have about 450mg). But an avocado has double that and a baked potato contains even more. If you eat all this plus a cup of raw spinach or silverbeet, you'll reach the daily intake for a woman.

Men will need to add a tub of reduced-fat yoghurt, a handful of nuts and an extra piece of fruit to reach their daily potassium target.

Potassium helps
lower your
blood pressure

The bottom line

Most of us can benefit from more potassium and less salt, because it keeps our blood pressure in check. But if you have a heart condition or a kidney problem, too much or too little potassium in the blood can be dangerous – which is why it would be great to see potassium make a comeback on all food labels! **hfg**

HOW TO GET YOUR DAILY POTASSIUM



BREAKFAST

50g untoasted muesli
with 1 sliced banana and
½ cup reduced-fat milk
= 800mg



SNACK

30g dried
apricots
= 450mg



LUNCH

2 slices soy-linseed
toast with 1 x 220g
can reduced-salt
baked beans
= 650mg



SNACK

1 x 140g tub
reduced-fat
fruit yoghurt
= 300mg



DINNER

150g steamed white fish
with ½ cup green beans
and 2 new potatoes
(skin on)
= 1700mg

**TOTAL =
3900mg**