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## Hyperkalemia: Symptoms, Common Risk Factors, and Management

You or someone you care about may have been diagnosed with hyperkalemia, a problem in which too much potassium is in the blood. This brochure will help you understand more about hyperkalemia, including its symptoms, common risk factors, and management.

### Symptoms of Hyperkalemia

There are often no symptoms of hyperkalemia, however, mild symptoms that appear over time may include:

- Nausea
- Muscle weakness
- Numbness
- Tingling



More severe symptoms that happen suddenly and require immediate medical care may include:

- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Vomiting
- Heart palpitations

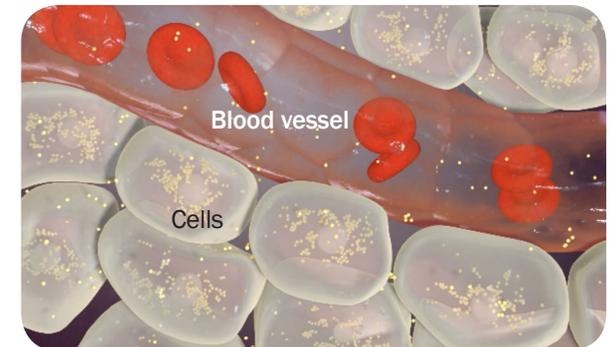
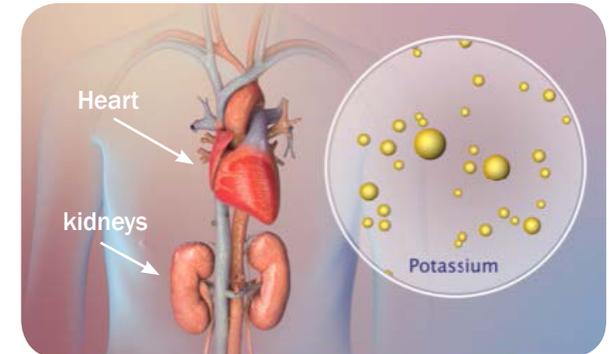
### Potassium in the Blood

The body needs to keep the right amount of potassium in the blood for nerves and muscles, including the heart, to work normally.

Potassium is one of several minerals that the body gets from food.

Most of it is stored in the cells of the body. And a small amount stays outside the cells, as well as in the blood.

Healthy kidneys help to maintain normal levels of potassium in the blood, by passing excess potassium out of the body in urine.



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### Common Risk Factors for Hyperkalemia

There are risk factors that may damage or impair the kidneys or prevent the body from keeping potassium in its cells, leading to hyperkalemia.

Some common risk factors for hyperkalemia include:

- Chronic kidney disease, a condition where the kidneys gradually lose their ability to work properly
- Heart failure, a condition where the heart has trouble pumping blood to the rest of the body
- High blood pressure, or hypertension, a disease where the force of blood on the walls of the arteries is too high and may lead to complications like chronic kidney disease and heart failure
- Diabetes, a disease where too much sugar is in the blood
- Medications taken for these or other conditions, which may prevent the kidneys or the body from maintaining normal levels of potassium

### Potassium Test and Levels

A doctor may do a blood test to check the body's potassium level.

For most people, a normal range is between 3.5 - 5.0 mEq/L. Hyperkalemia is a potassium level greater than 5.0 mEq/L.

### Managing Your Potassium Level

If you are at risk for high potassium, speak with your doctor about ways to manage your potassium level. You may be asked to avoid or limit eating foods that are high in potassium. In addition, your doctor may make changes to your medications.

To help minimize your risk of hyperkalemia, it's important that you know your risk factors, potassium level, foods to avoid, and medications you're taking.

If you have questions about hyperkalemia or any medications you have been prescribed, talk to your doctor. It is important to take your medications as directed, and report any side effects you have.

The information in this handout has been created and peer reviewed by graduate-level medical illustrators, followed by reviews from medical subject experts, either physicians or PhDs on the Nucleus Medical Review Board, to ensure medical accuracy and audience level appropriateness.

The handout is intended to supplement the information you receive from your healthcare provider and should never be considered personal medical advice. Always contact your healthcare provider with health questions and concerns.

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<City>, <ST> <Zip>  
<Office Phone> • <Office Fax>