

Treatment Complication: Hyperkalemia

(High Levels of Potassium in the Blood)

What is Hyperkalemia?

If you have hyperkalemia, it means you have too much potassium in your blood. Mild cases may have no symptoms. But, more severe cases that aren't treated can lead to emergency treatment.

Who is at Risk?

You may be at risk for hyperkalemia if you have conditions such as:

- Chronic kidney disease (CKD)
- Diabetes
- Congestive heart failure

Your risk increases if you have more than one of these conditions.

Certain drugs and supplements may increase your risk

You may be taking medicine for one or more of these conditions. Some medicines can upset the balance of potassium in your blood.

Medications linked to hyperkalemia include:

ACE inhibitors relax and widen your blood vessels. This lowers blood pressure. Blood flows more easily and your heart doesn't have to work as hard.

These drugs may be prescribed for:

- High blood pressure
- Congestive heart failure
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Risk of stroke and heart attack

ACE inhibitors work by interfering with the chemical messengers that tell the blood vessels to contract. A side effect is that they can also interfere with the kidneys' ability to remove extra potassium.

Continued on next page



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ARBs work in much the same way as ACE inhibitors - they dilate blood vessels and lower blood pressure. They can also cause potassium build up.

Potassium-sparing diuretics cause the kidneys to pass sodium and water, but affect the kidney's ability to remove potassium.

Beta-blockers cause your heart to beat more slowly and with less force. This lowers your blood pressure and the stress on your heart. Beta-blockers can also affect how potassium moves into cells, causing potassium to remain in the blood.

These drugs are often given after a heart attack, or to treat:

- Abnormal heart rhythms
- Angina (chest pain)
- High blood pressure

Other medications, supplements, and herbs may also affect blood potassium levels. These substances either contain potassium or limit the kidneys' ability to remove it:

- **NSAIDs** (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) can interfere with the kidneys' ability to remove potassium
- **Calcineurin inhibitors** prevent rejection of transplant organs and treat autoimmune disease
- **Heparin** is a blood thinner used to slow down the body's process of making blood clots
- **Trimethoprim** is an antibiotic used to treat bacterial infections in the urinary tract and in the lungs
- **Salt substitutes** may contain potassium
- **Herbal supplements**, such as noni, alfalfa, and dandelion, may contain potassium



Caution!

It's important to keep taking your prescribed medicine unless your doctor tells you to stop.