

# Potassium

Potassium functions in the body primarily as an intracellular-fluid cation. A cation is a positively charged ion. Intracellular fluid is any fluid that is found within a cell. As an intracellular cation, potassium is essential to all living cells. It helps maintain fluid balance and functions in nerve transmission, muscle contraction, and glycogen formation.

## Deficiency

Because potassium is present in most foods, deficiency is rarely reported. However, deficiency has been observed in cases of inadequate dietary intake due to malnutrition and depletion due to dehydration. A common cause of potassium depletion is prolonged use of diuretics, which promote potassium excretion via the kidneys. The symptoms of potassium deficiency include anorexia, nausea, drowsiness, weakness, and cardiac dysrhythmia.

## Excessive Intake

Excessive intake (18,000 milligrams or more) of potassium can cause acute hyperkalemia, which may lead to cardiac arrest and possibly even death. Hyperkalemia is a condition in which the blood-potassium level is abnormally high, usually due to a failure by the kidneys to excrete the potassium.

## Food and Supplement Sources

The average adult diet supplies about 2,500 to 3,400 milligrams of potassium per day. Individuals who consume high amounts of fruits and vegetables may even take in as much as 11,000 milligrams of potassium per day. However, if you are concerned that your potassium intake may be low, look for a multi-vitamin-and-mineral supplement that contains potassium. The forms of potassium that are used in supplements are potassium chloride, potassium ascorbate, and potassium-amino acid complexes. The best food sources of potassium are fruits and vegetables.

## Performance Daily Intake

The PDI of potassium for men and women who are healthy and actively training is 2,500 to 4,000 milligrams.

## Athletic Performance Goals

Studies support the adequate intake of potassium for the maintenance of overall health and athletic performance. Keep your daily potassium intake from food and supplement source to within the PDI guidelines. If you are an athlete who does not eat fruits and vegetables, take a multi-vitamin-and-mineral supplement that contains potassium. If you are an athlete who trains for long hours in a hot climate or experience profuse water loss through sweating, you, too, should take a multi-vitamin-and-mineral supplement that contains potassium. However, taking megadoses of potassium is not recommended.

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