

Potassium deficiency: Effects on the body and how to increase intake.

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Introduction

Potassium is a mineral that plays a crucial role in maintaining various bodily functions such as muscle contraction, fluid balance, and heart function. However, many people don't consume enough potassium, which can lead to potassium deficiency or hypokalemia. Potassium deficiency can cause a range of symptoms and health issues, and it's important to understand how to increase potassium intake to prevent or address a deficiency. In this article, we will discuss the effects of potassium deficiency on the body and ways to increase potassium intake.

Effects of potassium deficiency on the body

Potassium deficiency can occur due to a variety of reasons, including inadequate dietary intake, excessive sweating, diarrhea, or vomiting. The symptoms of potassium deficiency can be subtle and difficult to recognize, but if left untreated, it can lead to serious health problems.

Here are some of the effects of potassium deficiency on the body:

Muscle weakness and cramps: Potassium plays a crucial role in muscle contraction, so a deficiency can lead to muscle weakness, cramps, and spasms. This is because potassium helps regulate the electrical activity of muscles, which is necessary for them to contract and relax properly [1].

Fatigue and weakness: Potassium is also essential for energy production in the body. When potassium levels are low, the body may not be able to produce enough energy, leading to fatigue and weakness.

Abnormal heart rhythm: Potassium is crucial for maintaining proper heart function. A deficiency in potassium can disrupt the electrical impulses that regulate heart rhythm, leading to irregular heartbeat or arrhythmia. In severe cases, it can lead to cardiac arrest.

High blood pressure: Potassium helps regulate fluid balance in the body, which can affect blood pressure. A deficiency in potassium can lead to an increase in blood pressure, which can put a strain on the heart and increase the risk of heart disease [2].

Increased risk of kidney stones: Potassium helps regulate the acid-base balance in the body, which can affect the formation of kidney stones. A deficiency in potassium can increase the

risk of developing kidney stones.

Constipation: Potassium helps regulate digestive function, and a deficiency can lead to constipation.

How to increase potassium intake

The recommended daily intake of potassium for adults is 2,500 to 3,000 milligrams per day. Here are some ways to increase potassium intake:

Eat potassium-rich foods: One of the easiest ways to increase potassium intake is to consume foods that are rich in potassium. Some of the best sources of potassium include bananas, avocados, potatoes, sweet potatoes, spinach, tomatoes, and beans.

Consume more fruits and vegetables: Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of potassium, and they are also low in calories and high in fiber. Adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet can help increase potassium intake while providing other essential nutrients [3].

Use potassium-based salt substitutes: Many salt substitutes are made with potassium chloride instead of sodium chloride. Using these substitutes can help increase potassium intake while reducing sodium intake.

Take potassium supplements: Potassium supplements can be an effective way to increase potassium intake, but they should only be taken under the supervision of a healthcare professional. Taking too much potassium can lead to hyperkalemia, which can cause serious health problems.

Drink coconut water: Coconut water is a natural source of potassium and can be a refreshing way to increase potassium intake. One cup of coconut water contains around 600 milligrams of potassium.

Add herbs and spices to meals: Herbs and spices can add flavor to meals while also providing a small amount of potassium. Some of the best herbs and spices for potassium include parsley, dill, basil, and cinnamon. Adding these to your meals can provide a small but helpful boost to your potassium intake [4].

Cook with broths and stocks: Broths and stocks made from vegetables or meat can be a good source of potassium. Using these as a base for soups, stews, and sauces can help increase potassium intake while also adding flavour to meals.

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Choose low-sodium foods: Foods that are high in sodium can cause the body to excrete more potassium, which can lead to a deficiency. Choosing low-sodium foods can help the body retain potassium and prevent a deficiency.

Limit alcohol and caffeine consumption: Alcohol and caffeine can both increase potassium excretion in the body, which can lead to a deficiency. Limiting consumption of these substances can help prevent potassium deficiency.

Talk to a healthcare professional: If you are experiencing symptoms of potassium deficiency or are concerned about your potassium intake, talk to a healthcare professional. They can provide advice on how to increase potassium intake safely and address any underlying health issues that may be contributing to a deficiency [5].

Conclusion

Potassium is an essential mineral that plays a vital role in maintaining various bodily functions. Potassium deficiency can cause a range of symptoms and health issues, including muscle weakness, fatigue, abnormal heart rhythm, high blood pressure, and constipation. To prevent or address potassium deficiency, it's important to increase potassium intake through a balanced diet that includes potassium-rich foods, fruits,

and vegetables, as well as using salt substitutes, taking supplements, and limiting alcohol and caffeine consumption. By increasing potassium intake, individuals can maintain optimal health and prevent serious health issues.

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