

## Hyperkalemia

Hyperkalemia exists when the blood has an abnormally high level of potassium. Potassium is an electrolyte that maintains the electrical charges throughout the body's membranes. Electrolytes are chemical substances or chemical compounds that generate electrical charges when they dissolve in liquids. If the blood potassium level increases over normal levels, the body's cells may not function in the usual manner. This can affect heart function. It can also damage muscle function.

There may be different causes for hyperkalemia.

- If the kidneys are not working properly, the body will not be able to eliminate potassium to keep a normal level in the blood.
- Certain medications, such as angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors (ACE inhibitors) and some diuretics, may make the kidneys reabsorb more potassium than normal.
- When cells are destroyed, the potassium that is inside them is absorbed by the bloodstream more quickly than the body can expel it. This may happen as a result of burns, significant traumas, in reaction to a blood transfusion or other diseases that cause the cells to break down.
- Diseases affecting hormone function can also affect the manner in which the body regulates potassium.

High potassium levels can cause many symptoms. These include:

- Slow (depressed) reflexes.
- Muscle weakness.
- Abnormal heart rhythm.
- Nausea and diarrhea.

Very high potassium levels can cause a fatal heart attack.

You must provide the doctor with a description of the symptoms, especially those related to muscle weakness and changes in heart rhythm. The doctor will perform a physical examination on you and will order a lab test to determine the potassium level.

Treatment

The doctor will try to determine the cause of the problem and treat it, if possible. The doctor may order you to modify your diet. You may be prescribed medications to treat the condition. On some occasions, intravenous liquids are used to correct significant imbalances.