Reading Labels for Your Kidney Diet: Phosphorus and Potassium

Using food labels

Food labels give you information to help you compare similar foods and make healthy food choices. Reading nutrition labels can be an important tool when following a diet for kidney disease.

Nutrition information is found in three different places on food labels:
1. Ingredient list
2. Nutrition Facts table
3. Nutrition claims

Using this nutrition information will help you better manage your phosphorus and potassium levels.

Ingredient list

The ingredient list tells you what is in the food. Ingredients are listed by weight, from the largest amount to the smallest amount. It is the best tool to help find hidden sources of phosphorus.

Phosphorus can be added to foods as a phosphate additive. Phosphate additives are used to improve the taste and appearance of a food. Look for the words “phosphate” or “phosphoric” in the ingredient list. Avoid or limit these foods.

Phosphate additives are found in many foods such as:
- processed meats such as hot dogs and chicken fingers
- processed cheeses such as Cheez Whiz®
- convenience foods such as Kraft Dinner®, muffin mixes, puddings, and sauces
- frozen convenience foods such as pizza
- beverages such as colas and bottled iced tea

Remember to check the ingredient list often, as manufacturers may change the product ingredients.

When shopping:
- Ask the butcher for fresh, “unpumped” or “unenhanced” meat.
- Avoid frozen meats that have a phosphorus-rich solution added to them.
- Avoid foods that say “percentage of solution added”, “with broth”, or “flavour enhanced”.
- Avoid fresh or frozen meats that are high in sodium as they may also contain a solution high in phosphorus.
- If you have to limit your potassium, avoid foods that have ingredients that are high in potassium, such as bananas, oranges, potatoes, molasses, and potassium chloride (KCl). Compare the ingredient list to your list of high potassium foods.

Nutrition Facts table

The Nutrition Facts table provides information on serving size, calories and at least 13 different nutrients in an easy-to-read table.

Phosphorus and potassium are not always listed in the Nutrition Facts table. **Even if phosphorus or potassium is not listed it may still be in the food.** Go back to the list of ingredients to check for phosphate additives or potassium-rich foods.

Companies may have a website or consumer line to contact for information on phosphorus and potassium content. You can also ask your dietitian about this.
Sample Nutrition Facts table

Use these guidelines if potassium is listed on the Nutrition Facts table:
- Choose foods with less than 215 mg (less than 6% Daily Value) per serving for vegetables and fruit.
- Choose foods with less than 70 mg (less than 2% Daily Value) per serving for bread, cereal without milk, and cookies.
- Your daily potassium intake for a low potassium diet should be no more than 2400 mg. Check with your dietitian to see how much is right for you.

| Serving size is listed at the top of the Nutrition Facts table. The information in the Nutrition Facts table is based on the serving size. In the above example, one serving is 1 cup (55 grams). |

% Daily Value (DV) tells you if a food has a little or a lot of a nutrient compared to what is recommended. A quick guide to % Daily Value:
- 5% or less is low
- 15% or more is high

Use these guidelines if phosphorus is listed on the Nutrition Facts table:
- Choose foods with less than 60 to 70 mg (less than 6% Daily Value) per serving of breads and cereals.
- To keep your phosphorus at a healthy level you should eat no more than 1000 mg per day. Check with your dietitian to see how much is right for you.

Nutrition claims

Nutrition claims are voluntary. A food must meet government standards before it can display a nutrition claim. While claims can be used as a guide, always look at the Nutrition Facts table and ingredient list before choosing a product. There are two types of claims:

1. **Nutrient content claims** are statements which describe how much of a healthy nutrient is in a food. There are no allowed nutrient content claims for phosphorus or potassium.

2. **Health claims** describe a link between what you eat and certain diseases. The allowed health claim for potassium is “a healthy diet low in sodium and high in potassium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure”. This health claim does not apply to you if you are on a low potassium diet. There are no allowed health claims for phosphorus.

Caution!
Products that are reduced in sodium, such as low-sodium soups, may have large amounts of added potassium. This is found as potassium chloride (KCl) in the ingredient list. These foods are high in potassium.

Diet drinks may have acesulfame potassium (acesulfame K) added as a sweetener. The amounts of potassium may vary in these drinks. Speak with your dietitian.