

# Achieve

A Newsletter  
for AvMed  
Members

## ▶ YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH HEART FAILURE

### Potassium and your heart health

**P**otassium is an important mineral that works with sodium to regulate fluid in your cells. Too little of it can lead to high blood pressure and kidney stones. But too much potassium can cause problems for people with heart failure.

Medications like diuretics, beta-blockers, and ACE inhibitors can affect your blood potassium levels. Too much potassium can lead to hyperkalemia (high blood potassium), which can be life-threatening. Symptoms of hyperkalemia include:

- Muscle fatigue, weakness, or paralysis
- Irregular heartbeat
- Nausea

If you notice any of these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

To monitor your blood potassium, your doctor can perform a serum K blood test ("K" is the scientific symbol for potassium). If your levels are higher than normal, your doctor may recommend avoiding foods that are high in potassium (see sidebar for a list). Your doctor may also want to adjust your medications.

#### High potassium foods:

Avocado	Dried fruit
Banana	Milk
Beans and lentils	Potato
Broccoli	Spinach
Cantaloupe	Winter squash

Salt substitutes are another source of potassium. They are made by replacing some or all of the sodium in salt with potassium. So, if you're trying to cut back on sodium, talk to your doctor about whether salt substitutes are safe for you.



## Signs of a CHF exacerbation (and what to do)

**W**hen you're living with congestive heart failure, your symptoms may flare up sometimes. This is called an exacerbation.

"An exacerbation is a significant worsening of symptoms over a short period of time," says Juan R. Vilaro, M.D. He is an associate professor of medicine in the division of cardiology at the University of Florida. He adds that this can happen suddenly, within hours, or it can occur over several days. While an exacerbation is temporary, it can lead to a quicker progression of heart

failure, which can often lead to hospitalization.

These habits can help prevent an exacerbation:

- Take your medications as instructed. Talk to your care team if you're struggling with this.
- Keep a daily log of your weight, heart rate, and

blood pressure. These can help you spot early signs of fluid retention.

- Stop smoking and limit alcohol intake.
- Avoid salty foods. Sodium can cause fluid retention and trigger exacerbations.

Watch for these early signs of an exacerbation:

- Worsening shortness of breath, even with normal activity or at rest
- Gaining more than two to three pounds in 24 hours or five pounds in a week
- Swelling in the legs or feet
- Abdominal fullness
- Difficulty breathing while lying down or sleeping

If you notice any of these symptoms, Dr. Vilaro says the first step is to call your primary cardiologist. But if your symptoms are causing severe distress, "the safest path is to call 911 and have an ambulance bring you to the emergency room."

### Care Advocate Spotlight

**Diana Hall** has been with AvMed for 17 years, 15 years as a Member Engagement Representative, and 2 years as a Care Advocate.



"My favorite thing about being a Care Advocate is helping members with their health care needs and making a difference in their lives."

**To reach us, please call 1-833-609-0735**



## Healthy Eating Made Simple

Elizabeth Ferrer, R.D., AvMed's Registered Dietitian, shares her favorite tips for happier, healthier meals — without feeling deprived.



### Healthy holiday swaps

**W**hile “special occasion” treats can certainly be part of a healthy diet, the holiday season ushers in a lot of “special occasions” that can make it harder to stick to a healthy eating plan at this time of year. But these small changes can help.

#### Swap in non-starchy vegetables.

They're lower in carbs and higher in fiber. For example, try mixing mashed potatoes with cauliflower. Other non-

starchy vegetables include mushrooms, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, leafy greens, and eggplant.

#### Go for brothy soups instead of creamy soups.

They're less calorie dense, but just as comforting. Examples: chicken noodle, french onion, ramen, minestrone and more.

#### Keep sides simple.

Instead of rich, creamy casseroles, opt for simple roasted vegetables made with olive oil and herbs.

#### Choose lighter dips.

Hummus, guacamole and salsa have less saturated fat than creamy dips.

#### Use oils instead of butter and cream.

Oils are lower in saturated fat and provide heart-healthy unsaturated fats.

#### Use lower-fat dairy.

For example, use Greek yogurt instead of sour cream. It has more protein and less saturated fat.

#### Choose snacks wisely.

Instead of chips and cheese, go for low-calorie options like raw veggies, popcorn, and fresh fruit.

#### Cut the sugar in half.

You can almost always get away with less sugar in dessert recipes. Add extra spices for more flavor.

#### Unencrypted email makes it easier to communicate with your case manager!

To opt in, scan the QR code with your phone. Log in or register to the Member portal and select “Set My Preferences.”



## Recipe



# Dark Chocolate Bark with Hazelnuts and Cranberries

Serves 12 | Prep time: 15 minutes

This dessert looks impressive, but it's also a breeze to make. Experiment with different nuts and dried fruits.

### Ingredients

12 ounces dark chocolate,  
finely chopped  
¼ cup chopped hazelnuts  
¼ cup dried cranberries

### Directions

1. Line a rimmed baking dish with parchment paper.
2. Bring 1 inch of water to a simmer in a saucepan, then reduce heat to low. Place a heatproof bowl on top of the saucepan that fits snugly but doesn't

touch the water. Add the chocolate to the bowl and stir until just melted.

3. Pour the melted chocolate onto the baking sheet, then sprinkle with the hazelnuts and cranberries. Refrigerate for 1 hour, then break into large pieces.

### Nutrition Info

Calories 190 | Fat 12g (Sat Fat 6g) | Cholesterol 0mg | Sodium 0mg | Carbs 18g | Fiber 3g | Sugar 13g (inc. 11g Added Sugar) | Protein 2g Vit D 0µg | Calcium 20mg | Iron 2mg | Potassium 179mg