

HARM-REDUCTION STRATEGIES IF PURGING OCCURS

There are many health risks involved with purging behaviour. If you do engage in purging, we recommend that you follow the instructions stated below. Keep in mind that these are harm-reduction strategies, and **do not** eliminate the risks associated with purging behaviours. If you continue to engage in purging behaviours, you continue to be at risk for serious health problems.

1) Purging by vomiting, laxative abuse or diuretic abuse can cause dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, and hypokalemia (low potassium), which can lead to abnormal heart rhythms and sudden death. To help prevent this, eat or drink foods rich in potassium if purging occurs. **Consume one of the following potassium-rich foods as soon as possible after purging (within 30 to 60 minutes).**

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup yogurt
- 1 cup orange juice or tomato juice/V8
- ½ cup coconut water
- 1 banana
- 1 cup cantaloupe or honey dew melon
- 10 dried apricots or dates or prunes
- 4 dried figs
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ baked potato
- 1 sweet potato
- 1 cup cooked beans
- ½-1/3 avocado

The potassium-rich food must stay in your system for **at least 1 hour** in order to be absorbed. Thus, it is important not to engage in further purging behaviours following consumption of potassium-rich foods. If you have vomited multiple times in a row, and/or experience a lot of diarrhea, your risk for hypokalemia increases. We would recommend that you have at least 2 servings of potassium-rich foods in these situations.

You are most at risk for hypokalemia if your purging behaviour is erratic and you suddenly increase the frequency of vomiting episodes and/or laxative/diuretic use. Please note that two or more episodes of vomiting per day is considered “high intensity” purging and puts you at high risk for hypokalemia. If you are at high risk for hypokalemia, you should visit your doctor or emergency room and have blood work taken as soon as possible.

Below are some common symptoms of hypokalemia. If you have **one or more** of these symptoms, **go to your nearest emergency room immediately**. Be honest about the cause of your symptoms because doctors may not properly treat the problem if they make the wrong diagnosis.

- Muscle weakness or spasms
- Muscle cramps or pain
- Fatigue or dizziness
- Heart palpitations

2) Acid from vomiting causes erosion of teeth enamel. Don't brush your teeth after vomiting. Instead, rinse with a fluoride rinse and use baking soda to neutralize acid.