

## Electrolyte Imbalance

An electrolyte is a substance in the bloodstream that regulates important body functions. Some electrolytes are potassium, magnesium, sodium, phosphorous and calcium. Electrolytes are necessary so that muscles, organs (like the heart) and organ systems (like the nervous system) work properly.

Electrolyte levels can be measured when blood is drawn for testing. If the levels are too high or too low, this is called an electrolyte imbalance.

### Causes of Electrolyte Imbalance

There are many causes of an electrolyte imbalance, including:

- Loss of body fluids from vomiting, diarrhea, sweating or high fever.
- Chemotherapy.
- Medications, such as furosemide (Lasix®), that help patients with water retention.
- Antibiotics, such as AmBisome® and Cancidas®.
- Immunosuppressants, such as cyclosporine.
- Poor diet or not getting enough vitamins from food.

### Symptoms

Common symptoms of electrolyte imbalance include irregular heartbeat, confusion, fatigue, lightheadedness, blood pressure changes, muscle weakness or twitching, numbness and seizures. In general, a person with an electrolyte imbalance does not feel very well or want to be involved in much activity.

### Electrolyte Imbalances in Patients

Common electrolyte imbalances in patients include low potassium and low magnesium. The easiest way to replace the body's supply is to eat foods that are rich in potassium and magnesium.

Some examples of potassium-rich foods are:

- Dried fruits such as raisins, prunes, apricots and dates.
- Fruits such as bananas, strawberries, watermelon, oranges and cantaloupe.
- Dried vegetables such as beans and peas.
- Fresh meats like turkey, fish and beef.
- Baked potato (with skin).

Some examples of magnesium-rich foods are:

- Peanuts and peanut butter.
- Broccoli, spinach, okra, squash, corn and brown rice.
- Beans (soy, black, white, navy, lima, pinto and kidney).
- Yogurt and milk.

### **Other Ways to Increase Potassium and Magnesium**

Drinking fluids like Gatorade® can replace potassium and magnesium. Your doctor might also prescribe potassium and magnesium pills.

When electrolyte levels are significantly low, it may be necessary to receive them intravenously (through a vein).

If you have any questions or concerns, please check with your physician or nurse practitioner.