Hyperkalemia

Your lab work shows the potassium in your blood is too high. This is called hyperkalemia. It can happen with a number of conditions. **Some causes of this are:**

- Kidney disease.
- Too much potassium in the diet or supplements.
- Some medications.
- Internal bleeding.
- Muscle damage.

All of these can cause potassium levels to rise above the upper limit of normal. That number is 5.5 mEq/L. Record your level today.

Symptoms of hyperkalemia can include:

- Weakness.
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.
- Stomach cramps.

The most serious problems with high potassium are the EKG changes and heart irregularities. An EKG is a tracing of the electrical activity of your heart. **Very high potassium levels can cause cardiac arrest**. The treatment of high blood potassium depends on the cause. Some medications are associated with high potassium levels. These may need to be stopped or changed. This group includes some diuretics, ACE inhibitors, beta blockers, and anti-inflammatory medicines.

Avoid oral potassium and salt substitute. The amount you need may have to be re-evaluated by your caregiver. Increase your fluid intake. This helps clear potassium through your urine. Diuretic drugs may also be used to help lower levels. See your caregiver for follow-up as recommended.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU:

- Faint.
- Develop severe weakness.
- Develop nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.
- Have bad stomach cramps.
- Develop palpitations or irregular heart.
- Develop chest pain, or shortness of breath.

Document Released: 12/18/2006 Document Re-Released: 10/15/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.