Nurses Content
Downloaded from nursescontent.com

Serum electrolytes

Core Nursing Essentials Essential Laboratory Values

Use the laboratory's reference intervals and units for sodium, potassium and other electrolytes. Haemolysis can falsely elevate potassium and must not be ignored.

For educational purposes only.

Introduction & key concepts

Use the laboratory's reference intervals and units for sodium, potassium and other electrolytes. Haemolysis can falsely elevate potassium and must not be ignored.

Selected adult electrolyte examples

Examples from the cited source, not universal clinical thresholds. Use your reporting laboratory's age-, sex-, pregnancy- and method-specific interval.

Test	Example interval	Unit	Higher: possible contexts	Lower: possible contexts	Nursing responsibility
Sodium	136-146	mmol/L	Water deficit	Excess water relative to sodium	Assess fluid status, symptoms and trend.
Potassium	3.5-5.0	mmol/L	Reduced excretion; haemolysed sample	Losses or intracellular shift	Review sample quality and urgently escalate significant abnormalities.
Chloride	95-105	mmol/L	Fluid or acid-base disturbance	Losses or acid-base disturbance	Interpret with sodium and bicarbonate.
Bicarbonate	22-28	mmol/L	Metabolic or compensatory change	Metabolic or compensatory change	Correlate with blood gases and clinical findings.

These are possible contexts, not a diagnostic differential or treatment instruction. Critical-result reporting follows the local laboratory policy.

Nursing responsibilities

- Check identity, consent, the relevant observations and the purpose of the assessment.
- Record the finding, context and response using the approved clinical record.
- Escalate uncertainty or deterioration to the responsible professional; do not use a study note as a standing treatment order.

Clinical example & examination focus

In a viva, explain serum electrolytes in your own words, identify the observations needed and state a limitation. Compare the finding with the patient's baseline rather than assuming one number or label gives a diagnosis.

Nurses Content
Downloaded from nursescontent.com

Quick Revision

Use the laboratory's reference intervals and units for sodium, potassium and other electrolytes. Haemolysis can falsely elevate potassium and must not be ignored.

Frequently asked question

Can this summary replace practical training?

No. Use your prescribed learning material and the institution's current protocol with qualified supervision.

References & review status

- NBME - Laboratory Values (https://www.nbme.org/laboratory-values/) - Online reference accessed 26 November 2026. Selected factual adult example intervals only; local laboratory intervals take priority.

Sources checked for the stated scope on 26 November 2026. Original study synthesis; independent clinical review is not claimed. Source attribution is not a copyright-clearance certificate.

This content is provided for nursing education and academic reference only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, institutional clinical protocols or supervised clinical practice.

This content is provided for nursing education and academic reference only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, institutional clinical protocols or supervised clinical practice.

Source and attribution

Original concise teaching synthesis. NBME - Laboratory Values (https://www.nbme.org/laboratory-values/)

Online chapter: https://nursescontent.com/essentials/essential-laboratory-values/serum-electrolytes/

Downloaded from Nurses Content. Branding identifies the delivery website. Original author credits, third-party licences and applicable rights remain unchanged.