

**Nephrology Department**

**Using over-the-counter medications if you have renal failure or are on dialysis**

**Patient Information**

**Contact Information**

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**What are over-the-counter (OTC) medications?**

Over-the-counter medications are those which you can buy without a prescription from a pharmacy or supermarket to treat minor ailments. Because you have a renal condition there are problems that can arise from taking medicines that you can buy over-the-counter.

Such as:

* Paracetamol (such as Panadol®)
* Ibuprofen (such as Nurofen®)
* Cough mixtures (such as Benylin®)
* Cold remedies (such as Lemsip®)

**What problems can be caused when taking over-the-counter medications?**

* They can interact with other medicines that you take
* Some may make your kidney function worse
* Some medications may contain things which should be avoided if you have poor renal function or if you are on dialysis such as potassium, sodium or aluminium.

We advise that you talk to your doctor or pharmacist before buying over-the-counter medications as it should still be possible for you to buy suitable medicines to treat your minor ailments.

**What over-the-counter medicines can I take and which should I avoid?**

Because you have poor kidney function and possibly other medical conditions some over-the-counter medication may not be suitable for you.

Aspirin and ibuprofens belong to a group of medicines called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs can be harmful to the kidneys, therefore if you have poor renal function or are on dialysis you should avoid taking NSAIDs unless it is on the advice of your renal doctor.

The next page summarises the most common medications people buy over-the-counter and advises you on which you can buy and use and those which you should avoid.

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| **Ailment** | **What to avoid** | **Suitable alternatives** | **Additional comments** |
| **Constipation** | • Fybogel® (ispaghula husk) if you have a restricted fluid intake | • Senna | See your GP if you do not feel better within a week. |
| **Diarrhoea** | • Rehydration salts unless recommended by your kidney doctor | • Loperamide | If severe, contact your doctor. |
| **Vitamins** | • Vitamin A• Vitamin D• Multivitamins• Fish oil supplements (including cod liver oil) | None | These are not necessary unless prescribed for you by your doctor. |

**Points to remember when buying over-the-counter medications**

* You should only ever treat a minor ailment yourself for a few days. Should your symptoms change, get worse or last more than a few days you should see your GP.
* Remember that some of the medication your doctor may give you can also be brought over the counter so be careful not to double up on doses.
* It is important to tell the pharmacist if you have poor renal function, are on dialysis, that you have diabetes or if you have had an allergic reaction to any medications in the past.

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| **Ailment** | **What to avoid** | **Suitable alternatives** | **Additional comments** |
| **Headache** | • Ibuprofen• Aspirin• All effervescent products | • Paracetamol | See your doctor if your symptoms do not improve. Aspirin prescribed by your doctor at a low dose for the heart is safe to take, but only if advised by your doctor. |
| **Coughs and colds** | • Any medicines which contain a decongestant especially if you take tablets for high blood pressure.• Aspirin• Ibuprofen | • Paracetamol for aches and pains• Try simple linctus to soothe coughs and sore throats–ask for sugar-free products if you are diabetic. | Try menthol or steam inhalation to clear any congestion. |
| **Muscle aches** | • Tablets or creams containing ibuprofen | • Deep Heat® or Ralgex® | None |
| **Indigestion** | • Some people should avoid preparations containing aluminium, sodium, potassium or magnesium for example products such as Gaviscon® or Rennies® | • Preparations containing calcium (unless you have been told your calcium is high). | See your GP if you have indigestion regularly. |

* Where possible try to use the same pharmacy so that the pharmacist can gain a complete picture of the medications that you are taking, that way they can provide you with the best advice.
* If you find that you are frequently treating the same symptoms mention it to your GP at your next visit or make an appointment to see them.
* Always be careful not to take more than one medication that contains paracetamol - remember that Co-Codamol and Co-Dydramol do contain paracetamol.
* It is best to avoid effervescent tablets as they contain sodium and potassium
* Please also remember that although some medications are not recommended for you to buy they may be safe if your doctor has prescribed them for you.