

Department of Nephrology/Pharmacy

Using over the counter medicines if you have renal failure or are on dialysis

What are over the counter (OTC) medicines?

Over the counter medicines are medicines that you can buy without a prescription from pharmacies, supermarkets or garages to treat minor ailments.

As a patient with a renal condition there are sometimes problems with taking medicines that you can buy over the counter and this is important whether you have poor renal function or if you are on dialysis.

Examples of over the counter medicines include:

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

Problems that may happen with medicines that you can buy over the counter

- They may cause problems with other medicines you take.
- Some may make your kidney function worse.
- Some products contain things that should be avoided if you have renal failure or if you are on dialysis such as potassium, sodium or aluminium.

However, if you talk to your doctor or pharmacist, it should still be possible for you to buy suitable medicines to treat minor ailments.

What OTC medicines can I take and which should I avoid if I have poor renal function or if I am on dialysis?

You may have a number of medical conditions and are therefore prescribed several medicines from your doctor. As a result, some of the medicines that can be bought over the counter from pharmacies and other shops may be unsuitable for you.

Aspirin and ibuprofen belong to a group of medicines called Non Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs can be very harmful to kidneys, so if you have poor renal function or are on dialysis all NSAIDs should be avoided unless taken on the advice of your doctor.

Always let the pharmacist know that you have poor renal function or if you are on dialysis before you buy any medicine over the counter. Don't take any medicines which have not been prescribed for you without checking with a pharmacist first.

The table below summarises some of the medicines people commonly buy over the counter and tells you which you can buy and use and which you should avoid.

Ailment	What to avoid	Suitable alternatives	Additional comments
Headache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ibuprofen • Aspirin • All effervescent products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paracetamol 	See your doctor if symptoms don't improve. Aspirin prescribed by your doctor at a low dose for the heart is safe to take. But only if it is advised by your doctor.
Colds and coughs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any medicines containing a decongestant - especially if you take tablets for high blood pressure. • Aspirin • Ibuprofen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paracetamol for aches and pains • Try simple linctus to soothe coughs and sore throats - ask for sugar free products if you are diabetic. 	Try a menthol or steam inhalation to clear any congestion.
Muscle aches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tablets or creams containing ibuprofen or similar medicines such as ketoprofen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep Heat® or Ralgex®. 	None
Indigestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people should avoid any preparations containing aluminium, sodium, potassium or magnesium for example products such as Gaviscon® or Rennies® 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparations containing calcium (unless you have been told your calcium is high). 	See your doctor if you have indigestion regularly.

Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fybogel® (ispaghula husk) if you have a restricted fluid intake. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senna 	See your doctor if no better in a week.
Diarrhoea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehydration salts unless recommended by your doctor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loperamide. 	If severe, contact your doctor.
Vitamins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vitamin A vitamin D Multivitamins Fish oil supplements (including cod liver oil) 	Not necessary unless prescribed by your doctor.	

Some points to remember when buying medicines

- It is very important to tell any doctor or pharmacist recommending a medicine for you about your renal condition and the medicines you are taking.
- You should only treat minor ailments by yourself for a few days. If your symptoms change, get worse or last for more than a couple of days, see your doctor.
- Be aware that some of the tablets your doctor gives you can also be bought over the counter. Be careful not to take double the dose.
- Remember to tell the pharmacist that you have poor renal function or that you are on dialysis and also if you are diabetic or have had an allergic reaction to any medicine.
- Try to use the same pharmacy so that the pharmacist can build up a complete picture of all the drugs you are taking. They will then be able to provide you with the best advice.
- If you find that you need to treat the same symptoms frequently, please do not forget to mention them to your doctor at your next visit.
- Be careful not to take more than one preparation with paracetamol in - do not forget that co-codamol and co-dydramol contain paracetamol.
- Effervescent tablets are best avoided because they contain sodium and potassium.
- You should remember that, although some medicines are not recommended for you to buy, they may be safe for your doctor to prescribe them.



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For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Polish

Jeżeli chciałbyś uzyskać te informacje w innym języku, w dużej czcionce lub w formacie audio, poproś pracownika oddziału o kontakt z biurem Informacji Pacjenta (Patient Information) pod numerem telefonu: 01223 216032 lub pod adresem patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Portuguese

Se precisar desta informação noutra língua, em impressão de letras grandes ou formato áudio, por favor peça ao departamento que contacte a secção de Informação aos Doentes (Patient Information) pelo telefone 01223 216032 ou através do e-mail patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Arabic

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Cantonese

如您需以另一語言版本、特大字體或錄音形式索取本資料，請要求部門聯絡病人諮詢服務：電話 01223 216032，電郵地址 patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Turkish

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Urdu

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Bengali

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Document history

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Department	Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ www.cuh.org.uk
Contact number	01223 217502 (Medicines Helpline)
Publish/Review date	July 2010/July 2013 (no changes made)
File name	OTC_meds.doc
Version number/Ref	2/PIN1774