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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ailment</th>
<th>What to avoid</th>
<th>Suitable alternatives</th>
<th>Additional comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>• Ibuprofen • Aspirin • All effervescent products</td>
<td>• Paracetamol</td>
<td>See your doctor if symptoms don’t improve. Aspirin prescribed by your doctor is safe to take. Only if it is advised by your doctor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colds and coughs</td>
<td>• Any medicines containing a decongestant - especially if you take tablets for high blood pressure. • Aspirin • Ibuprofen</td>
<td>• Paracetamol for aches and pains • Try simple linctus to soothe coughs and sore throats - ask for sugar free products if you are diabetic.</td>
<td>Try a menthol or steam inhalation to clear any congestion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muscle aches</td>
<td>• Tablets or creams containing ibuprofen or similar medicines such as ketoprofen.</td>
<td>• Deep Heat® or Ralgex®</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigestion</td>
<td>• Some people should avoid any preparations containing aluminium, sodium, potassium or magnesium for example products such as Gaviscon® or Rennies®</td>
<td>• Preparations containing calcium (unless you have been told your calcium is high).</td>
<td>See your doctor if you have indigestion regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>• Fybogel® (ispaghula husk) if you have a restricted fluid intake.</td>
<td>• Senna</td>
<td>See your doctor if no better in a week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea</td>
<td>• Rehydration salts unless recommended by your doctor.</td>
<td>• Loperamide.</td>
<td>If severe, contact your doctor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Vitamins     | • Vitamin A  
• vitamin D  
• Multivitamins  
• Fish oil supplements (including cod liver oil) | Not necessary unless prescribed by your doctor. | |
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**Document history**

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