



Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications for Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease

Over-the-counter medications (OTC) are medications you can buy at the drug store or grocery store without a doctor's prescription to help relieve different symptoms. This guide will help you learn which medications you can safely take and which ones you should avoid.

Talk with your pharmacist to make sure these OTC medications are safe to take with your other prescribed medications.

Medications for pain, fever, or body aches

Okay to use:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®).
 - Use as directed and do not take more than the maximum daily dose.
 - If you have liver disease, talk to your doctor first.
 - Many cold and flu medications contain acetaminophen, so it's important to check the labels for the dose.

Avoid:

- All non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). They can cause kidney injury and make high blood pressure worse. Common NSAIDs are ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®).
- High doses of aspirin products, as they may cause kidney problems.

Medications for sneezing, itching, and runny nose

Okay to use:

- Antihistamines that cause the least amount of drowsiness: loratadine (Claritin®), fexofenadine (Allegra®), and cetirizine (Zyrtec®).

- A safe dose is 10 mg every 48 hours.
- Talk to your doctor before using an antihistamine if you have glaucoma, an enlarged prostate, or trouble urinating.

Avoid:

- Allegra-D®, Claritin-D®, Zyrtec-D® due to their effect on blood pressure.
- Combination (multi-symptom) cold, sinus, and flu products. It is better to treat each symptom separately.

Medications for nasal (nose) and sinus congestion

Okay to use:

- Nasal saline
 - Nasal spray oxymetazoline (Afrin®) should not be used for more than 3 days.

Avoid:

- Decongestants such as Sudafed® or Sudafed PE®. They can raise your blood pressure.
- Pseudoephedrine is not safe for kidney patients.

Medications for cough and chest congestion

Okay to use:

- Guaifenesin (Mucinex® and Robitussin DM®) for cough and chest congestion.
- The cough suppressant dextromethorphan (Delsym DM®, Vicks Nyquil Cough Liquid®).
- Coricidin Cold & Cough® can help with a dry cough.
- Vicks VapoRub® ointment and Vicks VapoSteam®.

If you have diabetes, look for sugar-free and alcohol-free products.

Medications for sore throat

Okay to use:

- Most throat lozenges (cough drops) are safe to use.
 - If you have diabetes, look for sugar-free products.

Medications for diarrhea

Okay to use:

- Loperamide (Imodium A-D®).
 - Don't use for more than 48 hours.

Avoid:

- Kaopectate® and Pepto Bismol®, as they can cause kidney injury.

Contact your primary care doctor if your diarrhea is heavy, bloody, or lasts longer than 24 hours.

Medications for constipation

Okay to use:

- Psyllium (Metamucil®).
 - Take other medications either 4 hours before or 2 hours after Metamucil®.
- Docusate (Colace®).
- Bisacodyl (Dulcolax®).
- Polyethylene glycol (Miralax®).
 - Drink a full glass of water with a dose of Miralax®. You must stay well-hydrated for this medication to work.
 - **Do not use if you are on fluid restrictions.**

Avoid:

- Magnesium citrate.
- Magnesium hydroxide (Milk of Magnesia®).
- Sodium phosphate enemas (Fleets®).

Department of Internal Medicine
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- Avoid using stimulant laxatives (medications that cause muscle movements in your bowels to push your stool/poop out) for longer than 1 week. Over time, they may cause dependence, can result in long-term diarrhea, and may cause changes in your electrolyte balance.

Call your doctor if you have any symptoms that do not improve in 2-3 days, or if you develop fever or chills.

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