

Guide to Over-the-Counter Medications for People with Chronic Kidney Disease

What are Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications?

Over-the-counter medications are medications that you can purchase at the drug store or grocery store to help relieve various symptoms. The information below will help you know which medications you can safely take and which ones you should avoid. Always follow the directions carefully and ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.

Call your doctor if:

- Your symptoms do not improve in 2-3 days
- Your symptoms begin to worsen
- You have a fever
- You have chills

Pain, fever and body aches

Okay to use:

- **Acetaminophen (Tylenol)** is the best choice for pain management.
 - Do not exceed a daily dose of 4,000 mg or 2,000 mg if you have liver disease.
 - Many products such as cold and flu medications contain acetaminophen, so it's important to check labels for the dose.

It is usually safe to use a low dose of Aspirin (81 mg or 325 mg once daily) for preventing heart disease and stroke; talk with your doctor first.

Avoid:

- Avoid all Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (**NSAIDS**). They can cause kidney injury and worsening high blood pressure.
 - Common NSAIDS are: ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and Naproxen (Aleve).

- Avoid high doses of Aspirin products, they may cause kidney problems.

Sneezing, itching and runny nose

Okay to use:

- **Antihistamines** are medications that block sneezing, itching and runny nose. They are effective and generally safe to use.
 - These cause the least amount of drowsiness: Claritin, Allegra, and Reactine.
 - Use these only when needed and at bedtime: Benedryl and Chlor-Trimeton, Chlor-Tabs. Side effects may include drowsiness, dry mouth, blurry vision, trouble passing urine, and constipation.
- Talk to your doctor before using an antihistamine if you have glaucoma, an enlarged prostate, or trouble urinating.

Avoid:

- Avoid combination (multi-symptom) cold, sinus, and flu products. It is better to treat each symptom separately.

Nasal and sinus congestion

Okay to use:

- Nasal sprays are the best choice for congestion.
- **Do not use nasal sprays such as Afrin or Otrivin for more than 3 days** because longer use can cause more congestion.
- Sodium chloride nasal spray is okay to use.

Avoid:

- **Do not use decongestants such as Sudafed) or Sudafed PE;** they can raise your blood pressure.
- Check the list of active ingredients in any medication you are taking; **pseudoephedrine** is not safe for kidney patients.

Cough and chest congestion

Okay to use:

- Guaifenesin (Robitussin DM Chest Congestion) can help with chest congestion and can make the cough more productive. It is also a good option for a wet cough.
- The cough suppressant dextromethorphan (Delsym DM, Vicks Nyquil Cough Liquid) can help with a dry cough.
- Vicks VapoRub ointment and Vicks VapoSteam are two different products that can temporarily help with cough and chest congestion.
- If you have diabetes, look for sugar-free and alcohol-free products.

Sore throat

- Most throat lozenges are safe to use. Look for sugar-free products if you have diabetes.

Diarrhea

Okay to use:

- Imodium can help with short-term treatment of diarrhea. **Do not** use it for more than 48 hours.
- Contact your doctor if diarrhea is:
 - Caused by an infection (**Do not** treat it with any OTC products.)
 - Heavy
 - Bloody
 - Lasts for more than a day
- Pepto Bismol is safe, but make sure you take only the dose recommended on the label.

Avoid:

- **Avoid** Kaopectate because it can cause kidney problems.

Constipation

- **Okay to use:**
 - Bulk-forming laxatives such as Metamucil can help.
 - Take your other medications at least 4 hours before or 2 hours after Metamucil.
- **Stool softeners** draw water to the colon to make stools softer and easier to pass.
 - You can use Docusate, Colace, and Soflax.
- **Stimulants** trigger the intestines to contract and push out the stool.
 - You can use Dulcolax, Senna, Senokot).
 - Avoid using stimulant laxatives for longer than one week because they may cause dependence, result in long-term diarrhea, and may cause changes in your electrolyte balance.
 - Miralax or PegaLAX, Lax-A-Day can be used **but be sure to drink a full glass of water with each dose**. Since this medication pulls water into the bowel, you must stay well-hydrated for it to work.

If you have questions about the safety of a medication not listed, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist.

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Reviewed and approved by:
Nidhi Sukul MD, Richard D Swartz MD, Marcia Thyron RN, Roxy Black BSN RN
Edited by: Karelyn Munro BA

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