

Medicines & Kidney Safety

Common products to use cautiously when you have kidney disease

Why medication review matters

The kidneys remove many medicines and their byproducts from the body. As kidney function changes, some medicines may require a lower dose, less frequent dosing, closer monitoring, or an alternative.

Do not stop a prescribed medicine because you see it on a kidney-safety list. Ask your nephrologist, prescribing clinician or pharmacist what is appropriate for you.

NSAID pain relievers

- Examples include ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve).
- NSAIDs can reduce blood flow to the kidneys and may worsen kidney function, blood pressure or fluid retention in susceptible patients.
- Ask your clinician what pain-relief options are safer for your situation.

Over-the-counter products

- Cold/flu products may contain NSAIDs or decongestants.
- Some antacids, laxatives and supplements contain magnesium, aluminum, phosphorus or potassium.
- Read combination-product labels carefully.
- Ask before using herbal or 'detox' kidney products.

Tell every healthcare professional that you have kidney disease

This includes physicians, dentists, urgent-care clinicians, pharmacists and anyone prescribing a new medication. Keep an updated medication list with you.

Medication Safety Checklist

How to reduce avoidable medication-related kidney problems

Ask before starting

- New over-the-counter pain medicines
- Herbal products or dietary supplements
- Potassium or magnesium supplements
- Salt substitutes containing potassium
- Creatine or bodybuilding supplements
- New vitamins in high doses

Medicines that may need kidney-based dosing

- Many antibiotics
- Some diabetes medicines
- Certain blood thinners
- Some antiviral medicines
- Gabapentin/pregabalin and several other neurologic medicines
- Many other prescription medicines depending on kidney function

During vomiting, diarrhea or dehydration

Illness with poor intake or dehydration can change kidney function and blood pressure. Some patients are given individualized instructions about temporarily holding certain medicines during significant illness. Ask your clinician whether you need a personal 'sick day' plan rather than stopping medicines on your own.

Before imaging or procedures

Tell the treating team that you have kidney disease. Contrast, medication adjustments and hydration decisions depend on your kidney function and the reason for the test or procedure.

Keep a current list of prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and supplements. Bring it to every medical visit and review it whenever your kidney function changes.