

Kidney Health Information

ANALGESICS AND KIDNEY DISEASE

Analgesics (medication for pain relief) can affect the kidneys in the following ways: –

Normal doses of some analgesics (including ibuprofen, aspirin and all NSAIDs as well as indomethacin) may worsen kidney function in patients who already have kidney disease. This change is usually reversible if the drug is withdrawn.

Low dose aspirin (150 mg or less) does not do this.

- Some analgesics (not usually aspirin or paracetamol) can cause an allergic inflammation of the kidney (acute interstitial nephritis) which comes on suddenly and may be accompanied by a skin rash and/or heavy protein loss in the urine. This is a relatively rare complication but an important one to recognise since it can be life threatening and this means you must avoid that drug in the future.
- Excessive consumption of analgesics over many years is a well recognised cause of some kidney diseases. Which particular analgesics cause this is questionable, but the most reported cases involve consumption of mixtures containing aspirin and phenacetin. Phenacetin has been withdrawn in many countries and the incidence of this disease is now low in the UK and USA.
- Extremely large doses of aspirin or paracetamol can cause acute renal failure (usually when taken as a suicide attempt)

- Paracetamol poisoning usually causes liver failure which may be accompanied by acute renal failure. Very occasionally renal failure occurs alone.

There may be some anxiety that if large doses can cause kidney disease in many individuals, lower doses may cause it in a few people. However, a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (July 2001) suggests that, whilst more research is needed, their findings provide reassurance that moderate analgesic use is unlikely to contribute to an increased risk of renal dysfunction among individuals without a history of renal impairment.

The following points should be considered when taking analgesics for pain relief:

- Don't take analgesics unless you really need them
- Take single drugs such as an aspirin or paracetamol
- Carefully study the instruction leaflet accompanying the medication
- If you have any kidney related illness, seek medical advice before taking analgesics
- If in doubt, consult your doctor or renal physician

Finding out more

Acute Interstitial Inflammation (AIN). This short summary from EDREN is about kidney inflammation caused by reactions to certain medications, some of them available 'over the counter'.

<http://renux.dmed.ed.ac.uk/EdREN/EdRenINFObits/Interstitial.html>

Interstitial kidney diseases. This is the extended version of the information from EDREN.

<http://renux.dmed.ed.ac.uk/EdREN/EdRenINFObits/InterstitialLong.html>

Please be aware that we have made every effort to ensure this information is accurate; however we cannot guarantee that there are no mistakes. Also, the best management plans for individual patients may vary from those outlined here. Only the doctors caring for the patient will be able to advise on this. Please consult your own doctor.

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Illustration produced by Beth Shortt.

Kidney Research UK, Kings Chambers, Priestgate, Peterborough PE1 1FG

Kidney Health Information telephone number: 0845 300 1499

Or email: kidneyhealth@kidneyresearchuk.org

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