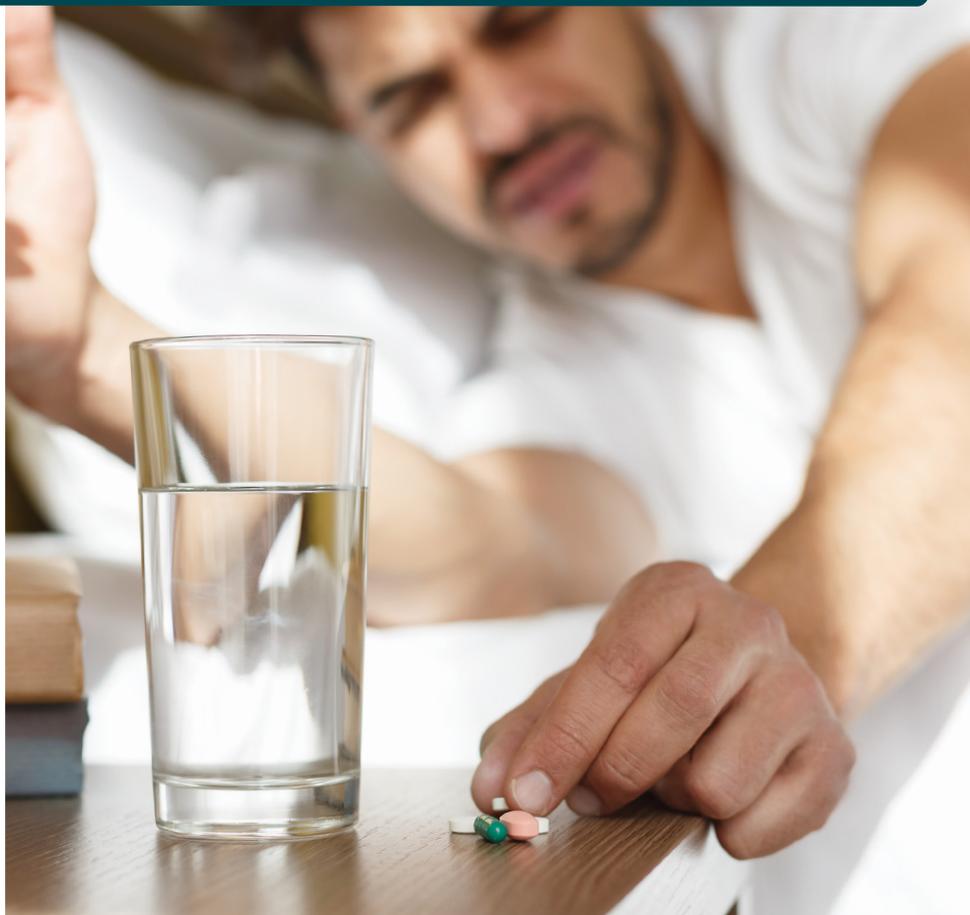


Pain medication for people with kidney disease

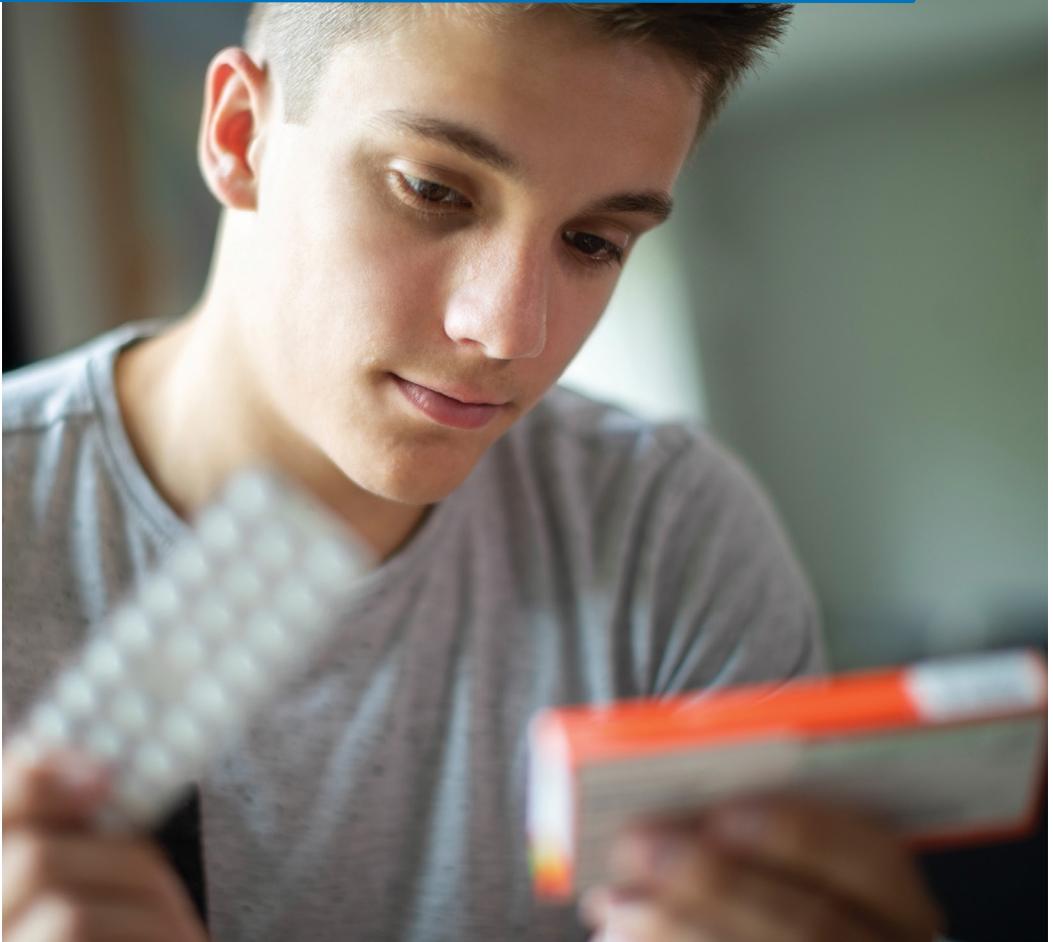


Pain is one of the most common and distressing symptoms for people with chronic kidney disease (CKD). Take care when choosing a pain killer (analgesic) as some types should not be taken by people with kidney problems or should only be used with specialist guidance.

When a pain killer is prescribed for you for either acute (short term) or chronic (long term) pain, a stepwise approach is used (the analgesic ladder). This means that the weakest pain killer from the first step of the analgesic ladder is tried first. If you are still in pain, a stronger pain killer will be tried. Your pain and any side effects will be monitored closely.

This leaflet explains the different types of pain killers recommended if you have kidney disease.

This information is for older children and adults only.



What are the different types of pain killers?

The main types of pain killer are:

- Paracetamol
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) e.g. ibuprofen, naproxen
- Weak opioids e.g. codeine, dihydrocodeine, tramadol
- Strong opioids e.g. morphine, oxycodone, alfentanil
- Others e.g. amitriptyline, gabapentin

The type of pain killer prescribed depends on how severe your pain is and where it is coming from.

Which pain killers are safe to use if I have kidney problems?

Paracetamol in standard doses is safe to take if you have kidney problems. Opioids can be used carefully starting with small doses and increasing the dose slowly if required and only under medical supervision.



Which pain killers should I avoid?

NSAIDs should be avoided if you have chronic kidney disease or have a kidney transplant. This is because they can worsen your kidney function and cause fluid retention. They may be safe to take if you are on dialysis and do not produce any urine but they can cause bleeding from the stomach and gut and should not be taken for long periods of time or if you have a history of ulcers.

Opiates should be used very carefully as levels can build up in the body and cause side effects such as drowsiness. They can also cause nausea and constipation, which can be a significant problem if you are on peritoneal dialysis as it can result in the catheter being squashed and therefore unable to drain the fluid correctly.

Always follow your doctor's or pharmacist's advice about painkillers and never take more than the recommended dose.



More information about pain killers

Paracetamol

This can be used safely in people whose kidneys are not working well. The standard dose is 500mg-1g every four-six hours, with a maximum of eight tablets in 24 hours. If you weigh less than 50kg or have liver disease you should only take 500mg every 6-8 hours. It is usual to add in another painkiller if paracetamol is not working for you.

Side effects may include liver damage with prolonged usage.

NSAIDs e.g. aspirin, ibuprofen, diclofenac, naproxen

These medications, as tablets, creams or gels, are best avoided if you have kidney disease or a kidney transplant as they can make your kidney function worse. You should therefore only take NSAIDs if they have been approved by your kidney doctor.

NSAIDs are usually taken two or three times a day, depending on the drug and preparation. Some NSAIDs are only available from your GP whereas others (e.g. ibuprofen) can be bought over the counter. Some cold medicines contain a NSAID so be careful not to take two different NSAIDs at the same time.

Side effects may include indigestion, stomach ulcers, bleeding from the gut, rash, worsening asthma, acute kidney injury, high blood pressure and fluid retention (oedema). There is also a risk of bleeding with low dose aspirin.



Weak opioids e.g. codeine

These medications are usually taken every four-six hours, with a maximum of six doses in 24 hours. People with kidney disease often only need very small doses of opioids and often get more side effects even with a small dose.

Side effects may include constipation, feeling/being sick and drowsiness. Laxatives can help with constipation **but these should only be taken after discussion with your doctor or pharmacist.** Try taking the pain killers with food if you feel sick. Avoid driving or operating machinery if you are feeling sleepy.

Strong opioids e.g. morphine, fentanyl, oxycodone

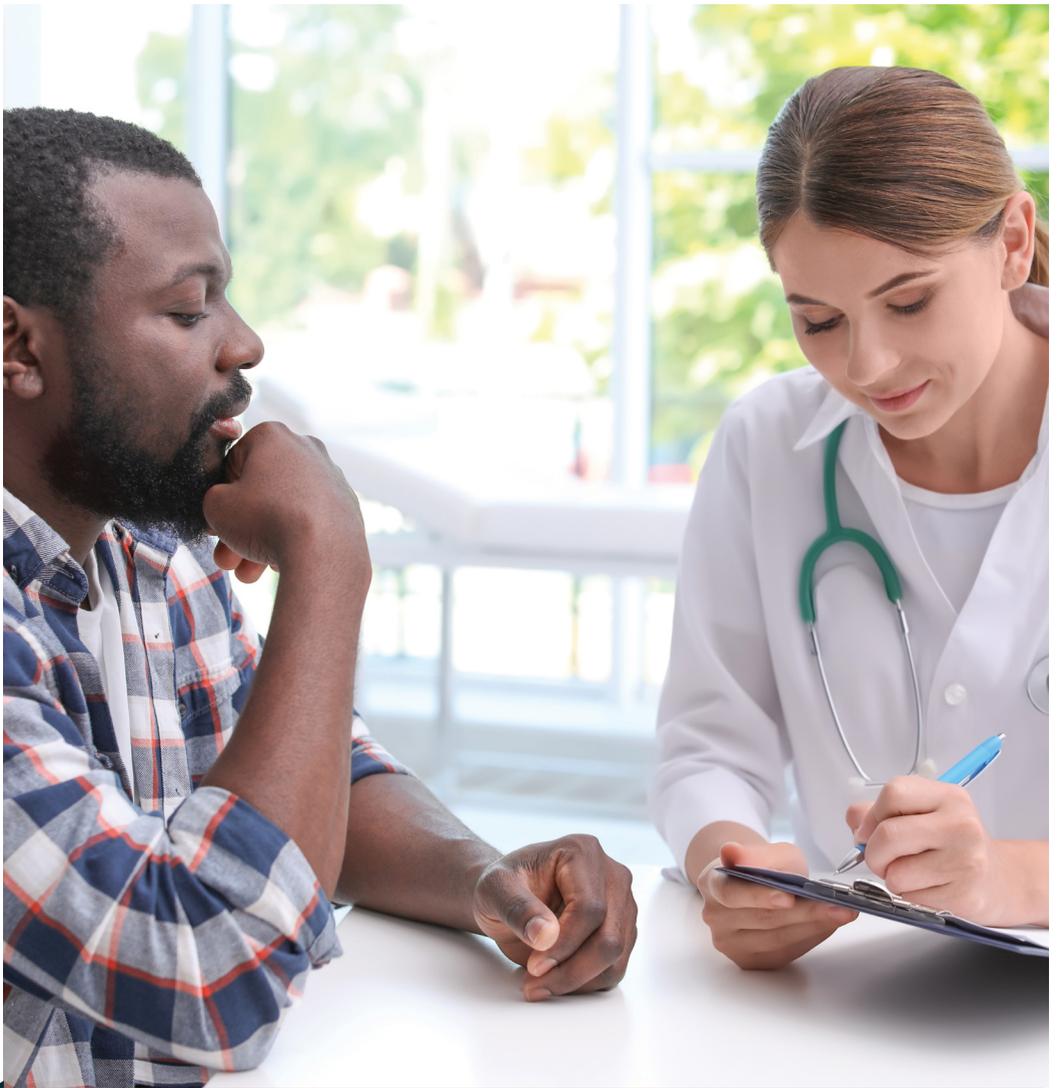
Morphine and oxycodone are usually taken every four-six hours. They are also available as 'slow release' preparations or skin patches which may be used less frequently, depending on the medicine. People with kidney disease often only need very small doses of opioids and often get more side effects even with a small dose.

Side effects may include constipation, feeling /being sick and drowsiness. Laxatives can help with constipation **but these should only be taken after discussion with your doctor or pharmacist.** Try taking the pain killers with food if you feel sick. Avoid driving or operating machinery if you are feeling sleepy.

Other pain killers e.g. gabapentin, amitriptyline

These pain killers are often used for neuropathic (nerve) pain. They are usually taken once or twice a day. People with kidney disease often only need very small doses of these medicines and often get more side effects even with a small dose.

Side effects may include drowsiness, anxiety and dizziness.



Important!

You should always store tablets in their original packet, in a cool, dry place and out of the sight and reach of children.

Do not get rid of any expired or unwanted medicine by flushing them down the toilet or throwing them in the bin. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

Where can I find out more information?

Talk to your GP, kidney doctor or pharmacist if you are in pain. They will be able to discuss which pain killers may be right for you.

It is particularly important that you talk to them before changing or starting any medications.

Other sources of information include:

- Kidney Care UK: Patient information - www.kidneycareuk.org
- NHS website: Kidney Disease - www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease
- NHS website: Pain management - www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/ways-to-manage-chronic-pain



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 [kidneycareuk.org](http://www.kidneycareuk.org)

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