



## Facts about Drugs, Herbs & Other Things That Can Damage Your Kidneys

Every drug that enters the body passes through the kidneys. The kidneys are also the main way the body gets rid of many drugs. Drugs include medications bought over-the-counter or medications prescribed by a doctor and street drugs. Some common drugs, herbs and x-ray dyes can cause the kidneys harm. If the kidneys are damaged to the point that they can no longer remove waste products from the body, death will result unless treated by dialysis (a process that cleans the blood of wastes and excess fluid) or by getting a kidney transplant.

### **Analgesics (painkillers)**

Analgesics are medicines that help control pain and reduce fever. Many of these medications are available over-the-counter.

Examples of analgesics are aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and the nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like, ibuprofen (Motrin®) and naproxen (Naprosyn®). Some analgesics contain more than one drug in one pill, such as aspirin, caffeine and acetaminophen. These medications are generally safe, when taken as directed. However, their heavy or long-term use, especially those that contain more than one drug, may cause kidney failure.

### **Alcohol**

Heavy drinking can hurt both the liver and kidneys. Chronic alcoholics have a high risk of getting both liver and kidney failure.

"Moonshine" (home-distilled liquor) can be very dangerous because it may contain lead, which is poisonous to the kidneys.

### **Antibiotics**

Even some antibiotics taken for infections can be harmful to the kidneys if they are not taken correctly. People with kidney disease will need smaller amounts of some antibiotics.

### **Illegal Drugs**

CRACK and cocaine use can result in high blood pressure, strokes, heart failure and death. CRACK, cocaine, heroin and amphetamines (speed, uppers) can also cause kidney damage. Even though some drug abusers with kidney failure can be helped by dialysis, others will die.

## **X-ray Dyes**

X-ray dyes can cause sudden kidney failure, especially in people who are seriously ill or who have kidney damage from conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure. Intravenous (IV) fluids may be necessary before receiving x-ray dye.

## **Herbs**

Many herbs can harm the kidneys and liver, cause cancer, high blood pressure, kidney stones, stroke, coma and even death.

Some herbs that are toxic to the kidneys are Aloe, Autumn Crocus, Buckthorn, Cascara, Guang Fan Ji, Horse Chestnut, Juniper berries and Juniper berry tea, Licorice Root, Periwinkle, Rhubarb, Sassafras, Senna, and Wormwood plant.

Other herbal products, like Black Pearl, have been found to be contaminated with substances, like lead and cadmium, which are toxic to the kidneys.

Some herbs interact with prescribed medications, causing serious side effects.

It is important to talk with your doctor, about herbs you may take. Just because it is "natural" does not mean it is safe.

## **What You Can Do to Help Protect Your Kidneys:**

- ◆ Do not take any drug or substance without a medical reason.
- ◆ Do not take pills given to you by a stranger or even a friend.
- ◆ Do not use over-the-counter medications for more than 10 days for pain or more than three days for fever. If you have pain or fever for a longer time, you should see a doctor.
- ◆ Read the warning label before using over-the-counter medications.
- ◆ Avoid prolonged use of analgesics that contain a mixture of painkilling ingredients.
- ◆ If you are taking analgesics, drink at least six to eight glasses of water per day.
- ◆ Use NSAIDs only under your doctor's supervision if you have heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney or liver disease or if you take diuretics (water pills) or are over 65 years of age.
- ◆ Make sure your doctor knows all prescribed and over-the-counter medications and herbs you are taking.