

# Kidney vs Other Medications?

Kidney diseases, especially chronic kidney disease, often co-exist with other conditions such as diabetes and heart problems. Should we worry that medications for those other conditions may harm the kidneys further?

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**H**ealthToday recently caught up with Dr Rafidah Dato' Abdullah, who came down to Klang in April for the National Kidney Foundation Malaysia's 12<sup>th</sup> Patient Forum for Kidney Failure Patients. In her talk, she shares some valuable insight on the subject of our kidneys and the usage of medications.

## PAINKILLERS

### Uses

To treat all kinds of aches and pains.

### Worsen the kidneys?

**"OF COURSE!"** says Dr Rafidah. Even common over-the-counter painkillers such as aspirin can be harmful to the kidneys if they are taken at high dosage or in high frequency (such as daily).

Dr Rafidah advises patients with kidney diseases to see a doctor if they experience frequent pain. "It is better to identify and address the cause of the pain instead of simply relying on painkillers," she adds. If painkillers are

necessary, such as when the patient suffers from gout, they must be taken based on the dosage and frequency prescribed by a qualified healthcare professional.

## ANTIBIOTICS

### Uses

To treat infections caused by bacteria. Note that antibiotics have no effect on viruses, so there is no point taking them when one has a cold, the flu or other viral infections.

### Worsen the kidneys?

**MAYBE.** "Certain antibiotics can affect the kidneys," says Dr Rafidah. "However, antibiotics in general are prescribed for a short duration of time – rarely more than 2 or 3 weeks. Thus, it is rare to encounter complications."

The best solution is to take antibiotics in the manner prescribed by the doctor. Incorrect use of antibiotics can harm the kidneys and also give rise to strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that either require the use of more potent (and expensive) antibiotics with more potential side effects, or, worse, they cannot be eliminated using any currently available antibiotics!

## DIABETES MEDICATIONS

**Uses.** To manage diabetes and other existing health conditions such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels.

### Worsen the kidneys?

**NO.** "Many people believe that diabetes medication can damage the kidneys, but this is not true," says Dr Rafidah. In fact, if a patient has both diabetes and kidney disease, good blood glucose management is essential to control both diseases!

The misperception often arises when a patient with both kidney disease and diabetes is told to reduce the dosage or stop taking certain diabetes medications when the kidney problem reaches an advanced stage.

"We do not do this because these medications are damaging the kidneys," she explains. "We do this because the kidneys are damaged to such an extent that we now want to reduce the stress on the kidneys."

To conclude, diabetes medications are fine as long as they are taken correctly, as advised by a healthcare professional. **HT**