

Tips for Safe Medication Disposal

You may have unused or expired medicines in your medicine cabinet if you did not take all of your prescription, or the medicine caused a side effect that made you want to stop taking it. It is important to let your doctor know if you have leftover prescription medicines. Your doctor may want to prescribe you a new medicine, or make sure you are taking the right amount at the right times.

It is also important that medicine is disposed of in a safe manner. Here are some helpful tips for safe disposal of unused or expired medicines.

Why should I get rid of my old or expired medicines?

- Medicines may lose their effectiveness after they have expired, and this can be dangerous to your health if you have certain medical conditions.
- The recommendations may have changed on some of your over-the-counter and prescription medicines. For example, it is no longer recommended that children under four years of age take cough or cold medicines.
- Leftover medicine can become a safety hazard to children, teenagers or other members of your household who do not understand the dangers of taking medicine not prescribed for them.

Why is proper disposal of unused medicine important?

Small amounts of medication have been found in our drinking water. While it is not certain how the medicine gets into the water system or even if it is harmful, it is no longer recommended that **all** unused or expired medicine be flushed down the toilet or poured into the sink.

How should I dispose of my unused or expired over-the-counter and prescription medicines?

Some communities have take-back programs or drop boxes where you can drop off or mail your unused or expired medicine to a local pharmacy, police department or other location. Call your city, pharmacy or police department or check the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency web site at <http://www.epa.state.il.us/> to see if your community offers a take-back program.

To dispose of most medicines, take the medicine out of its original package and place it in a sealable bag. Then mix the medicine with coffee grounds or kitty litter and water to make it undesirable to children, pets or people who may go through the trash. Finally, throw the sealed bag in the trash.

There are still a few medicines that should be disposed of by flushing the medicine down the toilet. If there is not a take back program in your area and the label on your medicine indicates it should be flushed, you should follow the label's instructions.



Illinois State Medical Society

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