

How to Handle Leftover Medication



Leftover, unused, or old medication is dangerous to keep in your home. It is important for you to know how to properly dispose of it.



■ *Why Remove Old Medications from Your Home?*

Keeping old medications in your home can put you or your family at risk of:

- **Poisoning.** Children and pets may get into the medicine and become sick or die. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as of 2005, the number of emergency department visits by young children for medication poisonings exceeded visits by children for automobile accidents.
- **Having medicine stolen.** People who have access to your house may go through medicine cabinets and take the drugs without your permission. Painkillers, in particular, can be illegally sold or given away so others can get high.
- **Taking medicine after its end date.** All drugs have end dates, also known as expiration dates. Many medications don't work as well after this date. Some can degrade in quality and make you sick. Do not risk taking medicine after the end date.
- **Using medicine unwisely.** Although it may be tempting to use old medicines when you feel sick instead of going to the doctor, this is very risky. Self-medicating with your own old medicine may lead to delayed treatment of a serious medical problem. The medicine may be past the end date or you may have unexpected reactions because of new medicines you're taking. Talk to your doctor, who can check your symptoms and your history, and, if necessary, write a new prescription that is right for your current illness.



■ *How Do I Safely Get Rid of Medications?*

DO NOT throw drugs in the trash, flush them down the toilet, or pour them down the drain. This can pollute the water.

DO ask your pharmacist what to do with old medications. Many pharmacies, including those at grocery stores, will take unused medicines and dispose of them properly for you. They may or may not charge a small fee.

DO look online. Several web pages can point you to programs and stores that collect unused medicine, such as

- the Drug Enforcement Administration; it organizes drug take-back programs a few times a year at certain locations. The dates and locations of upcoming events are posted at http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/
- the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website; it shows you how to properly throw away medicine, when it's appropriate: <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/ucm107163.pdf>
- Sharps Compliance, Inc.; it has a national directory of pharmacies that take back medicine: <http://www.sharpsinc.com/locations/>
- the American Medicine Chest Challenge; it has a national directory of permanent prescription drug collection boxes: <http://www.americanmedicinechest.com>

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration supports the Preventing Prescription Abuse in the Workplace Technical Assistance Center. For more information, contact PAWTArequest@PIRE.org. To join the PAW Listserv, visit <http://paw.dsgonline.com>, or simply scan the QR Code to the right.

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