

# A Patient Guide to Disposing of Unused, Unwanted, or Expired Medications

Is your medicine cabinet full of medications you no longer use? If so, you are not alone. Many Americans keep medications long after they have stopped using them. Many of us don't know how to safely dispose of them – so we keep them, believing they are safer in the medicine cabinet until we have stockpiles of pharmaceuticals. However, this is a potentially dangerous practice to those we care about most – our family and friends.

Medications your doctor prescribed to you may be harmful for someone else. Don't give your prescription medications to friends or family members that have similar symptoms for which the medication was prescribed to you. Encourage them to see their own doctor to get treatment that is right for them.

Unused, unwanted, or expired medications are a potential safety hazard to people of all ages. Children may explore and take medications accidentally. Teens and adults may take certain medications to experiment.

The opioid epidemic continues to be a crisis in the United States – it's a real problem. Most people who are addicted to opioids say they get them from family and friends. This means that you can help curb potential drug abuse and keep your family members and friends safer by taking the simple step of disposing of unwanted medications properly.

In order to decrease drug abuse and prevent all these household medications from getting into the wrong hands, drug take back programs were created. It is now possible for you to easily dispose of your unused, unwanted, or expired medications through a drug take back program – or if one is not available in your area, you can do it yourself at home.

## **DON'T:**

- Most medications should **not** be disposed of down the drain or down the toilet. Due to environmental concerns, **flushing should only be done as a last resort - when take-back options are not available and with those medications on the FDA Flush List.**
- Don't take your medications to your doctor's office for disposal.

## DO:

- Watch the FDA Video: How to Dispose of Medicine.  
<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know#MEDICINES>
- Participate in National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day. Please follow the link to check the DEA's next scheduled date.  
[http://www.dea.gov/diversion.usdoj.gov/drug\\_disposal/takeback](http://www.dea.gov/diversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback)
- Return chemotherapy pharmaceuticals to the clinic that dispensed them.
- Check with your local Sheriff's Department website for prescription drop box locations.
- Check with local pharmacies. Many pharmacies offer in-store facilities (collection kiosks) for disposal of unused medications. If they don't have kiosks, they might have postage paid mailers for you to mail back the medications.
- **As a last resort**, if there is not a take-back program in your area, you can dispose of medications yourself at home by following these steps:
  1. Determine whether the medication is one of the few that should be disposed of by flushing. Due to safety concerns, medications that are extremely harmful to others and potentially fatal should be flushed for safety. If medications are supposed to be flushed, do so. If not, follow the instructions under TRASH for medication disposal.
  2. **FLUSH:** To determine if it is recommended that the medication be disposed of by flushing, check the label, the patient information leaflet, or the FDA Flush List. Only flush those medications listed!  
<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know/drug-disposal-flush-potentially-dangerous-medicine#FlushList>
  3. **TRASH:** If the medication is not on the FDA Flush List, it is safe to properly dispose of the medication in the trash by following the steps provided.
    - a. Remove the medications from the original bottles and mix (do not crush them) them with something undesirable, such as used coffee grounds, dirt, or used cat litter.
    - b. Put the mixture in a container that will close such as a disposable bag or container.
    - c. Throw the container in your household trash.
    - d. Scratch out all your personal information on the empty medication packaging to protect your identity and privacy.