

What You Need to Know About Disposing of Unused Medicines

Medicines play a vital role in treating certain conditions and diseases, but they must be taken with care. Unused medicines must be disposed of properly to avoid harm.¹ It is important to know about the different options available to dispose of expired, unwanted, or unused medicines.

Take-Back Programs

Disposing of unused, unwanted, or expired medicines through a drug take-back program is the best way to reduce the chance that others may accidentally or intentionally take the medicine. Many take-back programs are associated with retail, hospital, or clinic pharmacies, and law enforcement facilities.^{2,3}



You can also speak with your local household trash service or recycling center to learn more about medicine take-back programs that may be available in your community.⁴

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) website also contains information on National Prescription Drug Take-Back Events. You can access this information from the DEA's home page.⁴

In some cases, you may not be able to get to a prescription drug take-back program, or one may not be available in your area. If this is the case, there are other ways to dispose of unused medications.

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Other Ways to Dispose of Your Medicines

Certain Types of Medicines Can Be Flushed Down the Toilet

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) maintains a list of medicines that can be flushed down the toilet. This is called the flush list. Medicines on the flush list have a high potential for misuse or abuse and can result in death if even one dose is taken inappropriately. Flushing these medicines down the toilet can help to ensure they are not accidentally or intentionally ingested, touched, misused, or abused and keep everyone in your home safer.²



Other Medicines Can Be Discarded in the Trash

If your medicine is not on the FDA flush list, you can follow these instructions to discard the medicine in your trash at home.⁵

- Do not crush tablets or capsules
- Mix medicines (liquids or pills) with an unappealing substance such as dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds
- Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag, and dispose of the container in the trash
- Scratch out any personal information on the prescription label to make it unreadable and place the container in the trash or recycle bin



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Resources

For more information about disposing of medicines safely, visit the following websites:

Drug Enforcement Administration

<https://www.dea.gov/takebackday>

Environmental Protection Agency

<https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-06/documents/how-to-dispose-medicines.pdf>

Food and Drug Administration

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know>

<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/where-and-how-dispose-unused-medicines>

References

1. Food and Drug Administration. Safe disposal of medicines. Updated November 22, 2021. Accessed October 13, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/ensuring-safe-use-medicine/safe-disposal-medicines>
2. Food and Drug Administration. Drug disposal: FDA's flush list for certain medicines. Updated October 1, 2020. Accessed October 13, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know/drug-disposal-fdas-flush-list-certain-medicines>
3. Food and Drug Administration. Disposal of unused medicines: what you should know. Updated October 1, 2020. Accessed October 13, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know#Q&A>
4. Food and Drug Administration. Transcript: disposal of unused medicines. Updated January 1, 2018. Accessed October 13, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/fda-drug-info-rounds-video/transcript-disposal-unused-medicines>
5. Food and Drug Administration. Drug disposal: dispose "non-flush list" medicines in the trash. Updated December 20, 2018. Accessed October 13, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know/drug-disposal-dispose-non-flush-list-medicine-trash>