

“I have unused prescription medications. How do I dispose of them safely?”



Improper medicine or drug disposal can lead to many problems for people and the environment. Proper disposal can prevent the negative effects on our environment that can take place if the drugs are not disposed of correctly. Safely disposing of drugs can also prevent them from getting into the hands of people who shouldn't have them.

Dangers of improper disposal

Accidental consumption: Drug poisoning is the number one cause of unintentional death in the United States. When drugs go out-of-date or aren't well labeled, it's easy for someone who is sick or confused, or simply can't see well, to swallow the wrong ones.

Drug misuse and abuse: Seventy percent of people who have misused prescription painkillers reported getting them from friends or relatives. Most people don't know that sharing opioids is a felony. People who take opioid painkillers for too long and in doses too large are more at risk of addiction and more likely to die of drug poisoning.

Contamination of water supply: In the past, unwanted medicines have been disposed of by flushing them down the toilet or pouring them down a drain. This can remove them from your home quickly but is not environmentally friendly or safe. The medicines travel through treatment plants and septic systems, and enter into our groundwater, rivers, ponds and streams. Even at very low concentrations, some of these medicines have affected fish and other aquatic life.

Disposing of expired or unused medications

National Drug Take Back programs: The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) sponsors National Prescription Drug Take Back Day in communities nationwide. Check the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website or with the DEA to find out if there is an authorized collector in your community.

Local drop boxes or take back programs: Many communities also have their own drug take back programs. Check with your local law enforcement officials to find a location near you.

Pharmacies: Some pharmacies have mail-back programs and disposal kiosks for unused medicines.

At-home disposal: If you are unable to locate a safe drug disposal site in your community, follow these steps to be sure to dispose of your medicines properly:

1. Keep medicines in original containers. Leave medication names visible to help identify the contents if they are accidentally swallowed. Cross out the other personal information on labels to make it unreadable (name, date of birth, address, phone number).
2. Disguise the medicine in their containers. Add some water or soda to pills to dissolve them. Add something inedible like cat litter, coffee grounds or dirt to liquids.
3. Close the lids and secure them with tape.
4. Hide containers in the trash. DO NOT put them in your recycle bin or in the trash without disguising and securing them—scavengers may find and eat them.

If you suspect any type of poisoning or overdose from prescription drugs contact 911 immediately.

For additional questions or concerns, call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 or visit www.poison.org. Both options are free, expert and confidential.

