

Patient Resources

When & How to Dispose of Old or Unused Medications

Many households become home to old and unused medications for a variety of reasons: the medication may be expired, damaged, or is no longer recommended to be taken by your physician. It is important to dispose of these medications safely to avoid harm to humans and the environment. Contrary to popular belief, it is not recommended to flush medications down the toilet. There is a very small list of medications that are approved to be flushed, so it is much safer to dispose of them in an alternate way.

Medications that should be disposed of:

- Expired
- Damaged
- No longer prescribed by physician

Expired Medications

Prescription Medication

To determine when your prescription medication expires, look at the prescription label. Below is an example label that shows what items are included on prescription labels and where you might find them. If you have difficulty locating the expiration date, go to your local pharmacy and speak with a pharmacist.



Doctor who wrote the prescription
Dr. Jones, John C
DATE 06/24/10

Date the prescription was filled
DATE 06/24/10

Phone number of the pharmacy
(800) 555-5555

Pharmacy name and address
CENTRAL PHARMACY
45 Main St, Anytown, US 12345

Prescription number
Rx# 231-479-161

Who the prescription is for
SMITH, JANE

Directions for taking the drug
TAKE ONE TABLET ORALLY DAILY OR EVERY SIX TO EIGHT HOURS AS NEEDED FOR SYMPTOMS.

Quantity in the container
24

Brand name of the drug
FAZACLO

Refills left
NO REFILLS

Generic name of the drug
CLOZAPINE

Dose, or strength, of the drug
TAB 10-500MG

Expiration date of the drug
USE BEFORE 06/24/12

Safety reminders
DO NOT TAKE THIS DRUG IF YOU BECOME PREGNANT
DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES WHEN TAKING THIS MEDICATION
MAY CAUSE DROWSINESS OR DIZZINESS

OTC Medications

OTC medications have expiration dates as well, although unlike prescription medications, the expiration date is not always in the same place. You may have to inspect the bottle or box that the medication is in. Below are three examples of where you may find expiration dates on OTC medication.

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



(Images courtesy of Consumer Med Safety, AgingCare.com, and Common Sense Homesteading)

Damaged Medications

Damaged medications may make you sick. You should not take:

- Medications that have changed color, texture, or smell, even if it has not expired.
- Pills that stick together, are harder or softer than normal, or are cracked and chipped.

Previous Prescriptions

Prescription medications should not be taken if your physician no longer prescribes them to you. Taking a prescription that is not prescribed to you, or is no longer prescribed to you, is considered drug misuse and may be harmful to your body.

Medication Disposal

Now that you know which medications to get dispose of, here's are simple instructions on how to dispose of those medications:

Follow these simple steps to dispose of medicines in the household trash

MIX
Mix medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) **with an unpalatable substance** such as dirt, kitty litter, or used coffee grounds;

PLACE
Place the mixture **in a container** such as a sealed plastic bag;

THROW
Throw the container **in your household trash**;

SCRATCH OUT
Scratch out **all personal information** on the prescription label of your empty pill bottle or empty medicine packaging to make it unreadable, then dispose of the container.

The infographic is divided into four horizontal sections with different background colors: brown, orange, yellow, and green. Each section contains a step number in large bold letters, a description of the step, and a small illustration. The 'MIX' step shows pills being mixed with soil. The 'PLACE' step shows a plastic bag being filled with the mixture. The 'THROW' step shows the bag being dropped into a trash can. The 'SCRATCH OUT' step shows a hand using a marker to black out information on a pill bottle label.

(Image courtesy of FDA.gov)