

Medication Safety for Older Adults



Dispose of your medications safely

Owning and taking medications comes with the responsibility to use the medicine as intended and prevent others from being exposed to it. This includes all types of medications, such as pills, capsules, gels, chewables, liquids, creams, eye or ear drops, nasal sprays, inhalers, vitamins and dietary supplements.

Keeping medications past their usefulness can be dangerous for a number of reasons. Some medications can become more or less potent over time and can also develop undesired side effects. Also, keeping medications in your home that you do not need increases the risk for accidental (or intentional) misuse. Medications that you will no longer take or that have passed the expiration date on their label should be disposed of properly and promptly.

- Tell your pharmacist the name of the medications that you wish to dispose of and ask about the most appropriate means of disposal.
- Follow any specific disposal instructions on the package or Drug Facts labels of non-prescription medications.
- Do not flush any medications down the sink or toilet unless the package or your doctor or pharmacist specifically instructs you to do so.
- For medications that can be disposed of in the regular trash, mix the medicine with an undesirable substance, such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds, then place into a sealable bag, bottle or container to reduce the risk of other people or animals consuming them. Do not crush tablets or capsules that will be disposed of in the regular trash.
- For medications that cannot be thrown in the regular trash, check with local pharmacies, law enforcement agencies or trash and recycling providers about medication disposal guidelines and options (e.g., drop box sites or Drug Take Back Day activities) in your community.
- Remove and destroy prescription labels, or scratch out identifying information on the label to make it unreadable.