

Medication safety disposal guide

During Patient Safety Awareness Week, the American Medical Association wants you to know the potential dangers of having expired, unwanted and unused medicines in your home.

It is important to dispose of expired, unwanted and unused prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications and supplements properly and safely to avoid harm to others and the environment. Otherwise, there is the potential for small children to gain access to them and for teenagers and adults to misuse them. Old and expired medicine can be ineffective, and some medicines do not work as well as they should when you take them with other medication or home remedies.

If you have any questions about the medicines and supplements in your home, talk to your doctor about medicine safety.

The AMA encourages you to follow the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) instructions below when throwing out expired, unwanted or unused medicines.

Safe medicine disposal

Step one

Sort through prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements to determine which ones may be expired or too old and possibly ineffective.

Step two

If you are unsure what is in a bottle or package, consider taking the unknown medicine or preparation to your pharmacist or doctor as soon as possible, so they can help you identify what it is.

Step three

Safely dispose of expired, unwanted and unused prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements.

Follow specific disposal instructions

Follow the disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information that came with the medicine. Do not flush any drugs down the toilet unless the information instructs you to do so. When in doubt about proper disposal, talk to your pharmacist or doctor.

Community drug take-back programs

The safest way to dispose of medicines is to take advantage of community drug take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Call your city or county government's household trash and recycling service, or look at your city's or county's Web page to see if a take-back program is available in your community. [The Drug Take-Back Network](#) can help you locate a take-back program in your state.

Disposal in household trash

If no medicine take-back program is available in your area, consumers can also follow these simple steps to dispose of most medicines in the household trash.

- Mix medicines (do NOT crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable or unpleasant substance such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds
- Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag, and throw the container in your household trash
- To protect your private health information, soak or take the label off the medicine bottle or package before throwing it away

If you have additional questions about disposing your medicine, please contact the FDA at **(888) INFO-FDA (463-6332)**. Visit the FDA's Web page "[How to dispose of unused medicines](#)" to learn more about safe medicine disposal.

Give your home a medicine safety check-up

- Keep all medicine in a safe place and out of reach of young children and teenagers
- Create a child-proof area that can be locked for all medicine
- Keep prescription pain relievers and sleeping pills in a cabinet or drawer that you can securely lock
- If your children can defeat a childproof lock, get a lock with a key and keep the key with you at all times
- Do not share another family member's prescription medicine with other members of your family

Visit ama-assn.org/go/medicationsafety for more information and resources.