

# Safe Disposal of Unneeded Medications

## Molly Marshall

Health & Human Sciences Educator  
Jackson County, Area 2  
Marsh119@purdue.edu  
(812) 358 – 6101

### Goal and Objective for Lesson:

Do you have medication that has expired, gone unused or is unwanted and are unsure of how to dispose of it? During this session, participants will learn how to dispose of medication immediately and properly. Practicing secure medication storage and proper disposal helps prevent accidental poisoning, prescription drug abuse or drug diversion in your home and community. Taking medication as prescribed also helps you keep track of current medications. We all have a part to play in building healthier and safer communities. Do your part by storing your medication safely, then when the time comes, properly disposing of medications.

### Lesson Plan:

- Take a short quiz to see if your medications are putting you or someone else at risk
- Discuss guidelines for properly taking medications
- Discuss tips for storing medications
- Discuss tips for properly disposing medications

## Take quiz to see if you are putting yourself or someone else at risk?

1) Are there unmarked containers in your medicine cabinet?

Yes

No

2) Have any of the medications changed color, texture or smell?

Yes

No

3) Are any of the medications in your cabinet beyond the expiration date?

Yes

No

4) Is your medicine cabinet locked?

Yes

No

If you answered yes to any of these questions then it's time to clean out your medicine cabinet! Before moving forward, let's take a few minutes to review each question and talk about how you might be putting yourself or someone in danger.

1. If you can't identify the medication, discard it. Always keep medications in their original containers so it is easily identified and not confused for something else.
2. Damaged medicine may make you sick. DO NOT take medicine that has changed color, texture, or smell, even if it has not expired.
3. Medications lose their effectiveness after the expiration date and some may be toxic. Also, keeping expired medications creates an unnecessary health risk in the home, especially if there are children present. Even child resistant containers cannot completely prevent a child from taking medicines that belong to someone else.

4. In the US, a majority of unintentional poisonings are caused by accidental exposure to medicine in the home.

## **Guidelines for Taking Medication as Prescribed**

Medication adherence, or taking medications correctly, is generally defined as the extent to which patients take medication as prescribed by their doctors. This involves factors such as getting prescriptions filled, remembering to take medication on time, and understanding the directions. Not taking medicine as prescribed by a doctor or instructed by a pharmacist could lead to your disease getting worse, hospitalization, and even death.

- Keep a list of all medications that you take (prescribed drugs, nonprescribed medicines, herbal supplements, home remedies, and medical foods)
- Make a list of any medicines that you cannot take due to allergic reactions, and share those with your doctor and pharmacists
- Tell your health care provider how you actually take your medication, especially if this is different from the originally prescribed directions
- Learn the names of the drug products that are prescribed and given to you, as well as their dosage, strength, and schedules
- Ask if there are certain foods, beverages, other medicines, or activities you should avoid while taking the drug
- Ask for any written information available on the drug product
- Question anything you don't understand or that doesn't seem right. Be especially alert to unexpected changes, such as receiving a prescription refill that seems to have a different strength or appearance from your original prescription
- Show that you understand how to use your medication by repeating information about your prescription back to your doctor or pharmacist

## **Tips for Storing Your Medication Properly**

Common abused prescription medications like painkillers are highly sought after. Keep prescription medications in a safe and secure location in your home so that they cannot be taken by others.

Prescription medications should be stored in their original bottles in the following:

- Locked cabinet
- Hidden location
- Lock box

## **Tips for Properly Disposing Medication**

Your medicine is for you! What's safe for you may be dangerous for someone else. You can dispose your expired, or unused medicines through a drug take back program – or at home.

Check your local paper to see if your community participates in the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) sponsored National Prescription Drug Take Back Day. This nationwide initiative usually takes place in April and October. Many communities also have their own permanent drug take back programs. Also check with your pharmacist to see if the pharmacy has a mail-back program or disposal kiosk for unused medicines.

# DISPOSE SAFELY. PREVENT MISUSE.

Dispose of unused or expired medications **the safe way**, by bringing them to an approved collection site.

Old prescriptions left at home are an easy source for someone thinking about abusing prescription medications and can pose danger to pets or children who may accidentally ingest them.



## By Safely Disposing

you will help prevent **poisoning, misuse, and overdose** in your community.



### Safe Disposal Is More Convenient Than You Think.

There are thousands of permanent drug disposal boxes located throughout the country.

To find a location near you, visit  
[safe.pharmacy/drug-disposal](https://safe.pharmacy/drug-disposal) using the QR code.

National Association of Boards of Pharmacy®





## Your Prescription Medicine: Tips for Safe Storage and Disposal

### Where do you keep your prescription medicine?

How and where you keep your medication can make a big difference when it comes to medication safety. Every year, two million people end up in the hospital due to drug-related injuries. This might include medication errors, adverse drug reactions, allergic reactions, or overdoses.<sup>1</sup>

Safe and secure storage of your prescription medicine can help avoid accidental injuries.

### How can I store my prescription medicine safely?

- **First, get organized.** Check to see if any of your prescription medicines are expired, since taking expired medication may no longer be safe or effective. Make sure your prescription medicine is stored in the original packaging, with the safety lock tightened and secured.
- **Second, secure your medicine.** Safe storage of these controlled medications is especially important, as they can be dangerous if taken when not prescribed.

### How can I dispose of my prescription medicine safely?<sup>2</sup>

You should dispose of any unused or expired prescription medicine as soon as possible. Timely disposal of prescription medicine can reduce the risk of others taking the medication accidentally or misusing the medication intentionally.

The best and most environmentally-friendly way to dispose of your prescription medicine is through a drug take-back program. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) periodically provides drug disposal sites in communities across the nation. The DEA also has permanent drug disposal sites in certain pharmacies or hospitals.

Get more information about drug disposal and a disposal site locator at [takebackday.dea.gov](http://takebackday.dea.gov).

### What if there are no drug disposal sites in my area?

If there are no disposal sites in your area, there are ways to safely dispose of your medication at home.

- **First, read the packaging label on your medication.** Controlled substances and other medicines can be harmful if ingested by others, so the label might have special disposal instructions that you should follow.
- **If there are no special disposal instructions, you can safely dispose of your medication in your household trash by following these four steps:**
  - 1) Mix your medicine with an inedible substance like dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds.
  - 2) Put the mixture in a container, such as a sealed plastic bag.
  - 3) Throw the container in your household trash.
  - 4) Scratch out all the personal information on the prescription label of your empty medication bottle to make it unreadable. Then dispose or recycle the empty medication bottle.

<sup>1</sup> See Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) Adverse Drug Events at <https://health.gov/hca/ade.asp>

<sup>2</sup> See Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Disposal of Unused Medications: What You Should Know at <https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm>

**Resources/References**

[https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/pdfs/WTC Factsheet Prescription Medicine WEB 0319-P.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/pdfs/WTC_Factsheet_Prescription_Medicine_WEB_0319-P.pdf)

<https://safe.pharmacy/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/DrugDisposalFlyer.png>

## IEHA Program Lesson Submission

<b>Author(s) Names and Email(s):</b>	Molly Marshall marsh119@purdue.edu
<b>County Where Author(s) Work:</b>	Jackson
<b>Area Where Author(s) Work:</b>	Area 2
<b>Phone Number of Author(s):</b>	812-358-6101
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<b>Topic Description:</b> (Information should be researched, educational, approved for use (if you are not the author, seek approval from materials author), and presented in a format that would allow an individual to read, study, and teach to other peers. <b>All copyright issues should be resolved before submission.</b>	<p>Do you have medication that has expired, gone unused or is unwanted and are unsure of how to dispose of it? During this session, participants will learn how to dispose of medication immediately and properly. Practicing secure medication storage and proper disposal helps prevent accidental poisoning, prescription drug abuse or drug diversion in your home and community. Taking medication as prescribed also helps you keep track of current medications. We all have a part to play in building healthier and safer communities. Do your part by storing your medication safely, then when the time comes, properly disposing of medications.</p>
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