

Patient Teaching Guide for Disposal of Unused Medicines: What You Should Know

Overview

Medicines play an important role in treating many conditions and diseases, but when they are no longer needed it's important to dispose of them properly to avoid harm to others. Below, we list some disposal options and some special disposal instructions for you to consider when throwing out expired, unwanted, or unused medicines.

Medicine Take-Back Programs

Medicine take-back programs for disposal are a good way to remove expired, unwanted, or unused medicines from the home and reduce the chance that others may accidentally take the medicine. Contact your city or county government's household trash and recycling service to see if there is a medicine take-back program in your community and learn about any special rules regarding which medicines can be taken back. You can also talk to your pharmacist to see if he or she knows of other medicine disposal programs in your area or visit the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's website for information at

http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/

Disposal in Household Trash

If no medicine take-back program is available in your area, you 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 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.
- Before throwing out your empty pill bottle or other empty medicine packaging, remember to scratch out all information on the prescription label to make it unreadable.

Medicines Recommended for Disposal by Flushing

There is a small number of medicines that may be especially harmful and, in some cases, fatal with just one dose if they are used by someone other than the person for whom the medicine was prescribed. To prevent accidental ingestion by children, pets, or anyone else, a few medicines have specific disposal instructions indicating they should be flushed down the sink or toilet as soon as they are no longer needed, and when they cannot be disposed of through a medicine take-back program. For example, patients in assisted living communities using fentanyl patches for pain should immediately flush their used or unneeded patches down the toilet. When you dispose of these patches and certain other powerful medicines down the sink or toilet you help to keep others safe by ensuring that these medicines cannot be used again or accidentally ingested and cause harm.

The following list from the FDA tells you what expired, unwanted, or unused medicines you should flush down the sink or toilet to help prevent danger to people and pets in the home. Flushing these medicines will get rid of them right away and help keep your family and pets safe.

Patient Name: _____

Additional Resources

- [DEA Nationwide Prescription Drug Take-Back Initiative](#)
- [Safe Use Initiative: Fentanyl Transdermal System “Patches”: Safe Disposal](#)
- [Don't Be Tempted to Use Expired Medicines](#)
- [Needles and Other Sharps \(Safe Disposal Outside of Health Care Settings\)](#)
- [Expiration Dates Matter](#)
- [New FDA Web Page Lists Disposal Instructions for Select Medicines](#)

Contact FDA

Toll Free
(855) 543-3784, or
(301) 796-3400
druginfo@fda.hhs.gov

Human Drug Information Page Last Updated: 04/28/2014

Division of Drug Information (CDER)
Office of Communications

[Feedback Form](#)

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Notes and Questions for my doctor or nurse: _____

References:

Online at:

<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm#MEDICINES>. Accessed 6/25/14