

Safe Drug Disposal

Is your medicine cabinet filled with expired drugs or medications you no longer use? How should you dispose of them? The following article is adapted from information published by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Most prescription drugs can be thrown in the household trash, but consumers should take certain precautions before tossing them out, according to the FDA.

A few drugs should be flushed down the toilet, if the label so directs.

- Take advantage of the periodic National Drug Take Back Days when medications can be delivered to various public locations for official disposal. (Check the CC@ H website for upcoming dates.)
- Follow any specific disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information that accompanies the medication. Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet unless this information specifically instructs you to do so.
- If no instructions are given on the drug label and you can't wait for the next take-back day, throw the drugs in the household trash, but first:
 - Take them out of their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter. The medication will be less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through your trash.
 - Put them in a sealable bag, empty can, or other container to prevent the medication from leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.
- Before throwing out a medicine container, scratch out all identifying information on the prescription label to make it unreadable. This will help protect your identity and the privacy of your personal health information.
- Place the empty plastic vial or bottle into your blue recycling bin. Empty aerosol inhalers can be recycled in your blue recycling bin, too.
- Do not give medications to friends. Doctors prescribe drugs based on a person's specific symptoms and medical history. A drug that works for you could be dangerous for someone else.
- When in doubt about proper disposal, talk to your pharmacist.

The same disposal methods for prescription drugs apply to over-the-counter drugs as well.

When a drug contains instructions to flush it down the toilet, it's because FDA, working with the manufacturer, has determined this method to be the most appropriate route of disposal that presents the least risk to safety and reduces the danger of unintentional use.

Despite the safety reasons for flushing drugs, some people are questioning the practice because of concerns about trace levels of drug residues found in surface water, such as rivers and lakes, and in some community drinking water supplies. However, the main way drug residues enter water systems is by people taking medications and then naturally passing them through their bodies. Nonetheless, the FDA does not want to add drug residues into water systems unnecessarily.

For more information, click on the following links (or copy and paste them into your browser):

www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm

or

<http://m.montgomerycountymd.gov/sws/how/medicine.html>