



IT'S TIME TO LOOK IN YOUR MEDICINE CABINET!

Some individuals like to hold onto their prescription and over-the-counter medications “just in case” they need them someday. Initially this may sound wise, but there are several valid reasons **not** to do this.

- First, using medications that are not specifically prescribed by a physician for the current ailment can be dangerous. (This is self diagnosis and doing this is a risk to your health.)
- The drug you self prescribe could be the **wrong** medication, the **wrong** dose (strength), and have the wrong directions for the **wrong** diagnosis.
- The medication you have saved may be **weakened** and therefore not effective and conversely other medications can become **more potent** and **toxic** with age.
- Finally, “unused or saved” prescription may be used by others as illegal drugs.
 - “Abuse of prescription drugs to get high has become increasingly prevalent among teens and young adults. Past year abuse of prescription pain killers now ranks second—only behind marijuana—as the Nation's most prevalent illegal drug problem.”

Source: Office of National Drug Control Policy: http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/prescr_drug_abuse.html

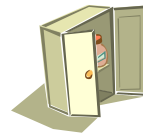
It should be noted that medications, including the over-the-counter drugs you purchase, have an expiration date the same as your other household items -- cake mixes, cereals or the milk you drink daily. The expiration date is the drug manufacturers guarantee that the medication will remain safe and have full potency until this date as long as they are stored properly. When initially making a purchase of over-the-counter medications check the package for the expiration date. By doing this you will be purchasing the package with the **longest remaining shelf life**. It is tempting to procure the large economy size package of over-the counter medications. While this may look like a great value this is only true if you will use up all the medication before the expiration date.



Pay attention to the labels the pharmacist affixes to the container! Some liquid medications, may have a “do not use after ___ (date)” stated on the label. It is important to discard any remaining portion of this type of medication immediately.

You cannot always tell if a drug has deteriorated by looking at it. While it is true some tablets may become powdery, develop an

odor and/or other obvious physical change, the absence of change does not guarantee that the drug has not changed.



The proper storage of your medications is imperative to maintain the correct potency and preventing disintegration of the drug. Heat, humidity and with certain drugs light can cause the drugs to degrade. Therefore the closet or medicine cabinet located in the bathroom and/ or a kitchen cabinet near the shower, sink, stove or dishwasher are poor choices for storing your medications. A better choice is a cabinet or closet in a cool, dry room. Another consideration in storing medications is safety. Remember to keep all medications in a safe place that prevents access by children or grandchildren who live in or visit your home. Additionally, as appropriate to your individual circumstances, consider a locked box for your medication storage

Underlying the problem of having “unused or saved” prescription is the fact that they are meant to be used up over a specific period of time—so none should be “left over”. An exception to this would be analgesics (colloquially known as a painkiller) that are

stopped when the pain cycle has resolved and prescribed medications that have been discontinued.

Other medications, such as the antidepressant drugs that are prescribed to be taken continuously, may have both physical and psychological side effects if stopped suddenly. It is always wise to consult your prescribing physician before deciding to stop a medication that you feel is not working or you perceive is making you feel badly. The physician will usually have a simple solution to the problem – a change in dosage, a different medication, or a change in the time you take the medication each day may relieve the offending symptoms. Antibiotics that are prescribed are meant to be taken until they are all used! Stopping them because one ‘feels better’ can be very unwise

and expensive. Unwise in that the organisms causing the infection have not been totally killed and the remaining offenders *raise their heads and re-grow-- only now they are resistant to the antibiotic that was used* and they require a more potent class of antibiotic to ‘kill them’. As this happens repeatedly you progressively reduce the number of options one has to fight future infections because the individual becomes “resistive” to more and more classes of medications that will be effective against this and future offending microorganism(s). Additionally from a cost standpoint, finishing the first medication, in most cases would have licked the culprit. The next prescription may eliminate the offending organism but it usually costs more and the financial burden to you personally or the health care system is dramatically increased.



How to Dispose of Unused Medications

Federal Guidelines:

- Take unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers and throw them in the trash.
- Mixing prescription drugs with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter, and putting them in impermeable, non-descript containers, such as empty cans or sealable bags; will further ensure the drugs are not diverted.
- Flush prescription drugs down the toilet *only* if the label or accompanying patient information specifically instructs doing so (see box).
- Take advantage of community pharmaceutical take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Some communities have pharmaceutical take-back programs or community solid-waste programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Where these exist, they are a good way to dispose of unused pharmaceuticals.

The FDA advises that the following drugs be flushed down the toilet instead of thrown in the trash: **Actiq** (fentanyl citrate)**Daytrana Transdermal Patch** (methylphenidate)**Duragesic Transdermal System** (fentanyl)**OxyContin Tablets** (oxycodone)**Avinza Capsules** (morphine sulfate)**Baraclude Tablets** (entecavir)**Reyataz Capsules** (atazanavir sulfate)**Tequin Tablets** (gatifloxacin)**Zerit for Oral Solution** (stavudine)**Meperidine HCl Tablets****Percocet** (Oxycodone and Acetaminophen)**Xyrem** (Sodium Oxybate)**Fentora** (fentanyl buccal tablet)Note: Patients should always refer to printed material accompanying their medication for specific instructions.

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