

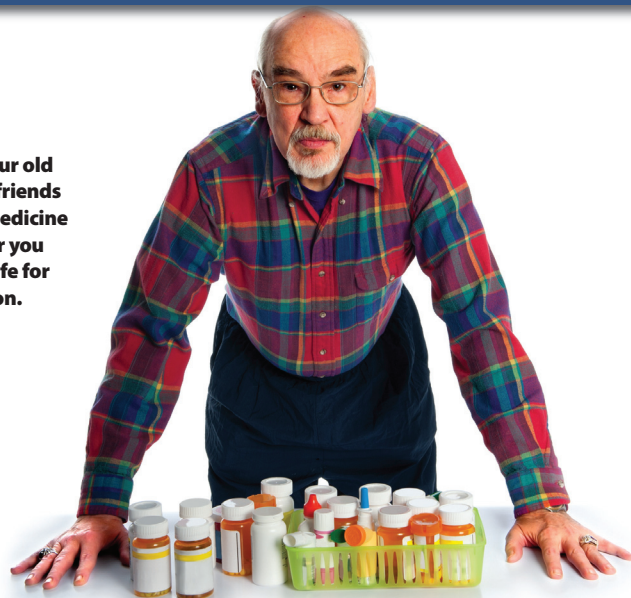
Spring Clean Your Medicine Cabinet

If you're like many people, you may still have medicines in your home that you don't use anymore. You may not need them any longer or they may be out-of-date. What should you do with them? The answer depends on the medicine. Use the tips below to help you spring clean your medicine cabinet.

Most unwanted medicines can be put in the garbage. But, be sure to read the directions on the medicine label or in the patient information that comes with the medicine. If it doesn't tell you to get rid of it a different way, you can throw it in the trash. But first, follow these steps.

- 1 Take the medicine out of the container it came in.
- 2 Mix the medicine with dirty things for the garbage, such as cat litter or coffee grounds. This way pets or kids are less likely to eat the medicine by accident. This also hides the medicine from anyone who may go through your trash.
- 3 Put the medicine mixture in a plastic zipper bag or other container that you can close up. This stops the medicine from leaking or spilling out of the garbage bag.
- 4 When you throw the original bottle away, scratch off any personal information. This may include your name, address, and prescription number. This helps protect your identity.

Never give your old medicines to friends or family. A medicine that's right for you may not be safe for another person.



Some medicines must be flushed down the toilet or sink. These are the kinds of medicines that can do a lot of harm to someone who wasn't supposed to take them. When the medicines go down the sink or toilet, kids, pets, or anyone else can't take them by accident.

Never give your old medicines to friends or family. Your doctor gave **you** the medicine because of **your** condition and medical history. A medicine that's right for you may not be safe for another person.

Some pharmacies may take your old medicines. If you have any questions about how to get rid of your medicines, you can always ask your doctor, Health Management Nurse, or pharmacist.

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Keeping Up with Your Medicines

There's a lot to keep track of when you have a chronic health condition. And taking your medicines the right way is an important one. You may already have a routine that works well for you to help you remember to take your medicines. If so, keep up the good work!

If you find it hard to keep up with your medicines, you're not alone. Here are some tips to help you take your medicines the right way at the right time.

- ❑ Write down a medicine schedule that you can check off as you take each one. Include the time, name, and dose of each medicine. Keep the schedule where you can easily see it.
- ❑ Take your medicines at the same time every day.
- ❑ Ask your doctor if there are ways to simplify your schedule.
- ❑ Organize and fill a weekly pill box. A pill box may be a good option for medicines that don't have special storage instructions. Ask your pharmacist to help you choose one that works for you.
- ❑ If you take medicines at different times of the day, keep a separate pill box for each time. Keep your pill box in a place where you can easily see it at the time that your medicine is due. For example, put your dinner time pill container on the dinner table, your bed time pill container next to your bed. Keep in mind the medicines should be out of reach of children.
- ❑ Set a timer or alarm on a cell phone or clock to remind you to take your medicines.
- ❑ Ask your pharmacist about special medicine bottles that beep or chime when it's time to take your medicine.

Tips for Using Medicines Safely

Ask questions about your medicines.

Choose a doctor or pharmacist you feel comfortable talking with. Bring a list of questions you have about your health or medicines. Be sure to write down the answers or have the doctor or pharmacist give you written instructions. You may also want to take a family member or friend with you to your doctor visits. This can help you get and understand the information you need.

Make sure the medicine the pharmacy gives you is what your doctor ordered.

Does the medicine look different than what the doctor said it would look like? Does the medicine you're getting filled again look different than what you have been taking? If something seems wrong, ask the pharmacist to double-check the medicine you're getting.

Ask how to use the medicine correctly.

Read the directions on the label and any information that comes with the medicine. If you prefer, ask your pharmacist to print your label with larger letters. Ask if there are any medicines, foods, or activities that you should avoid while taking this medicine. Also, find out if there are any lab tests you need to get done while taking the medicine.

Ask about possible side effects.

Side effects can happen with any medicine. Some are more bothersome than others. Ask your doctor or pharmacist which side effects are common and which ones should be reported to your doctor. Remember to call your doctor right away if you have any side effects that your doctor should know about.

Questions and Answers: Safe Places to Drop off Your Medicines

Q | I don't feel comfortable putting my unused or out-of-date medicines in the garbage. Some of the labels even say not to throw the medicines in the garbage. How can I get rid of these medicines?

Answer: If you don't feel comfortable throwing away your medicines in the trash, there are other ways to get rid of them.

- ▶ Call your recycling and trash service and ask if there is a take-back program in your town. A take-back program has places you can drop off these medicines. Then they will take care of throwing out the medicines the right way.
- ▶ Go to the website <http://Earth911.com/recycling>. Click on “**Unwanted or Expired Medications**”. Then enter your zip code and get a list of places near you that offer a take-back program.
- ▶ Ask your pharmacist. They may know about programs in your area that take old medicines.

Q | Can I take my unused or out-of-date medicines to my pharmacy or doctor's office?

Answer: Maybe. Some pharmacies or doctor's offices will accept them. But, they may not always be able to. Some places may not have ways to throw away the medicines safely. Call your doctor's office or pharmacy to find out if they have a medicine take-back program or if they know of other options for you to take care of this.

Is It Safe for the Water?

You may be wondering whether it's safe to flush medicine down the toilet or sink. The FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) works to keep people safe. They often review and update the list of medicines that should be flushed or poured down the drain. Medicines the FDA says should be flushed and not thrown away in the garbage are medicines that can be very dangerous if taken by accident.



If you don't feel comfortable throwing away your medicines in the trash, there are other ways to get rid of them. Ask your pharmacist. They may know about programs in your area that take old medicines.

You may have heard that rivers, lakes, and drinking water contain small amounts of medicines. Some people think that this is because of the medicines that get flushed down the toilet or sink. But, very little medicine actually gets into the water this way.

You might be surprised to know that the main way medicines get into our water is from people taking their medicines and then going to the bathroom! Most medicines aren't fully used up by the body. So this unused medicine leaves the body in urine or stool and naturally ends up in our water supply.

Some people worry about being hurt by the medicine in the rivers, lakes, and drinking water. So far, there's no proof that these tiny amounts of medicine in the water has caused harm to anyone. If you still have questions about this, talk to your Health Management Nurse.

Visit the FDA website at <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm#MEDICINES> for a complete list of the medicines that need to be flushed down the toilet or sink.

Keeping a Medicine List

What is a medicine list? It's a way to keep track of all the prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, and supplements you take. Be sure to bring this list with you each time you go to your doctor's office or to the pharmacy. It's important for your doctor and pharmacist to know all the medicines that you are taking. They can make sure the medicines you are taking don't get in the way of each other. You should update your medicine list every time your doctor changes how you take a medicine, when you stop taking a medicine, or when you start a new one.

A medicine list should contain the following information about each medicine:

- ▶ Name of it
- ▶ Why you take it
- ▶ How to take it
- ▶ How much and how often to take it (dosage)
- ▶ Name of the doctor who prescribed it
- ▶ What it looks like (e.g. shape, color, size)

The enclosed “**My Medicine List**” wallet card will allow you to have a list of your medicines on you at all times. You can also visit the FDA website <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/AboutFDA/ReportsManualsForms/Forms/UCM095018.pdf> to get a copy of “**My Medicine Record**.”

Talk to your Health Management Nurse to learn more about keeping a useful medicine list.

Did you know?

The DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) sponsors National Drug Take-Back Day? Visit the website at http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/index.html for the latest information.

This *CareConnections* newsletter was reviewed for medical accuracy by Andrew Krueger, MD, FACP.

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Accordant
A CVS Caremark Company

4900 KOGER BOULEVARD / SUITE 100
GREENSBORO, NC 27407

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