

HOW TO STORE AND SAFELY DISPOSE OF YOUR PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS



When you bring prescription medications into your home, you have a real responsibility for what happens to those drugs when you are done. It does not matter if the medicine in question is an opioid for the pain from your back injury, antibiotics to treat your child’s ear infection, or antiviral medication to nip the flu bug in the bud. All of those drugs, no matter what they are designed to treat, can be harmful or even deadly in the wrong hands.

One of the biggest culprits in the current epidemic of prescription drug abuse is legitimate medication being sold to street-level dealers. This process, known as diversion, is a serious issue, and one that can no longer be ignored.

The diversion of prescription drugs is a real problem, and it is not just opiates that are to blame. Many different classes of medication, from benzodiazepines to treat anxiety to prescription cough medicine to treat a winter cold, are subject to abuse. Just ask any police officer or emergency room physician how dangerous this kind of diversion can be.

DRUG DIVERSION: COSTLY & DEADLY



According to recent statistics, the cost of drug diversion to both public and private institutions is at least **\$72 billion a year**, and that does not even count the enormous human cost. The number of prescription pills that make it on to the street is immense – according to some estimates, as many as **one million OxyContin** pills alone ended up on the street.

RESOURCES

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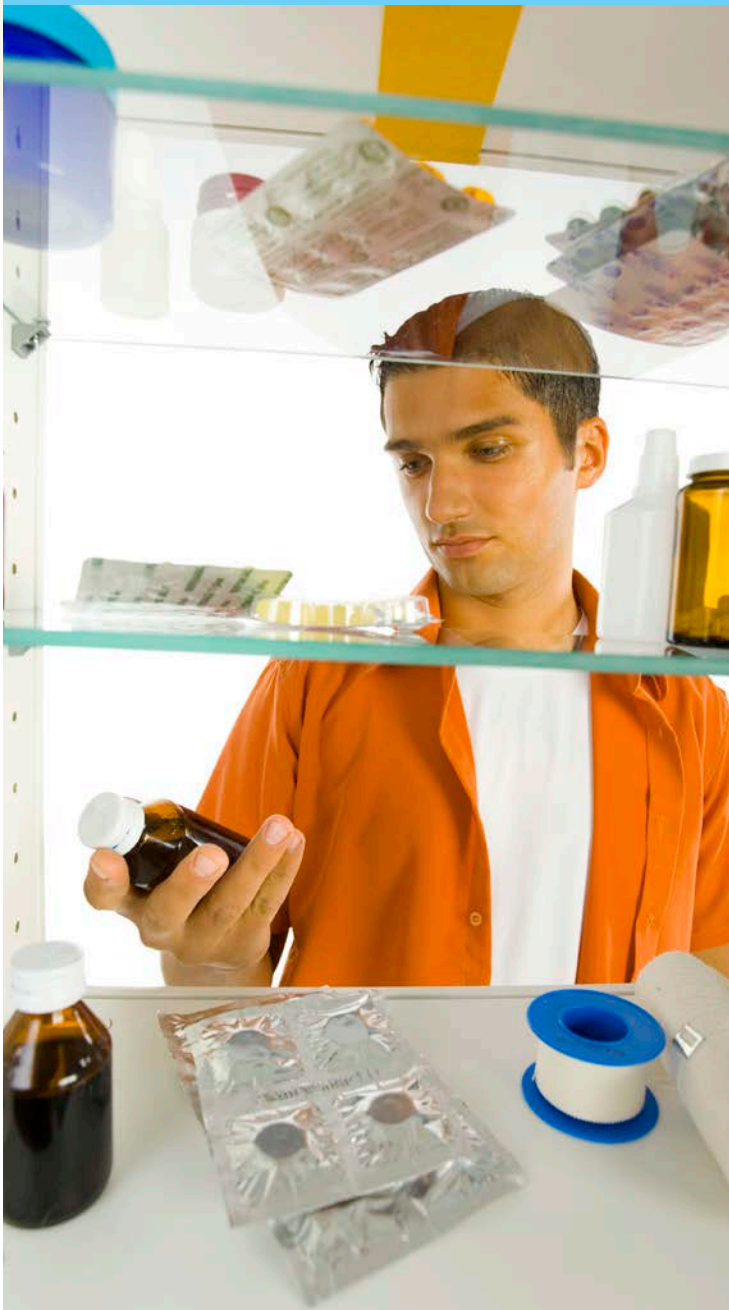
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Consolidate Your Storage

If you are on a lot of medications, you may have them stored in different places around your home. You may keep your prescription cough syrup in the medicine cabinet, your inhalers by the sink and your other pill bottles in a kitchen drawer.

That may seem like a smart thing to do, but keeping your prescription medications in multiple places increases the risk of misuse and diversion. It only takes a minute for a curious teenager to grab a pill or two, or for an exploring toddler to stumble upon what they think is candy. Consolidate and safely store your prescription medications, and you just might save a life.

Secure Your Meds

Start by making a list of all the prescription medications you take, including the names of the medicines, the dosages and the expiration dates. Write down what each drug is for, and the approximate time you started taking it. Also, keep a list of your prescription medications with you in case you ever need emergency treatment.

Pick a single location and use that as your secure storage location. That storage location can be anywhere you choose, from a shelf in the linen closet to a drawer in your kitchen cabinets. Just make sure it is a space you can lock and adequately secure. Some people prefer to keep their medications in a locked box; a small, fireproof safe works well for this purpose. Just be sure you keep the key with you, and keep it away from friends or family members who might want to break into your supply. No matter what storage solution you use, it is essential to keep it locked and out of the reach of toddlers, pets, and anyone else who could be harmed by ingesting that medication.

End-to-End Care

When you bring medications into your home you should have a storage and disposal plan in place. End-to-end care and proper storage of prescription medications is the best way to prevent diversion and protect yourself, your family members and society as a whole.

Whether you are taking the medication for a short period of time or for the long term the same storage and disposal rules apply. Here are some key things to know about the safe use, storage and disposal of prescription medications.



Mark Your Calendar

Track and know when each of your prescription medications expires, take a minute to note it on a calendar. Disposing of old and expired medications is important, but you do not have to do all the disposal at once. Set aside a separate spot in your locked cabinet, or assign another secure location, to hold those pills until you are ready to get rid of them.

Also, look for partially depleted prescriptions you no longer need. If you hurt your back last year, you may still have a few odd pain pills hanging around. Pulling those medicines aside and marking them for disposal will make everyone safer.

Check Your Medication Stash

Even if you store your medication properly, it is important to check and make sure nothing is missing, especially if you have lots of visitors.

Carefully count your pills, especially ones for anxiety, depression, and pain. These medications are highly sought-after on the street, and it only takes a minute for a few pills to go missing. If nothing else, this occasional pill check will give you extra peace of mind.

Whether you take medication every day for a chronic condition or just once in awhile it is important to dispose of medication properly. Here are some things you need to know:

- Do track your expiration dates. Expired medications are ineffective at best and potentially dangerous at worst.
- Don't give your medication to others. Sharing medications can be dangerous, and it could lead to diversion of those pills to the street.
- Do lock up your medications, even over-the-counter remedies. Securing your medications can protect children, pets and visitors to your home.
- Do take your medications as prescribed. Talk to your doctor about how to take your meds, and make sure you understand those instructions.
- Don't leave medications in your purse or pocket. It is too easy for children to find them there.

Dispose of Your Medication Properly

- Do not merely toss your prescription meds out with the trash. The pills could be diverted, or they could be eaten by curious critters, wandering cats or your neighbor's dog.
- If you must put your medications in the trash, remove them from their bottles and mix them in with unwanted waste like used kitty litter, old coffee grounds, vegetable peelings and so on. Use nondescript packaging like empty cans or plastic bags, to disguise the medication and stop diversion.

- Never flush pills down the toilet, unless the package directs you to. Some drugs - like fentanyl and other opioids - are so dangerous, the only way to keep the community safe is to flush them after use.
- Never give your medicines to someone else, even with the same medical condition. Sharing drugs is dangerous, and your friend could have an allergy or sensitivity to that medication.



Community Take Back

The best way to dispose of old and unwanted prescriptions is through a community-based pharmaceutical take-back program. The Drug Enforcement Administration hosts several prescription drug take-back days each year, covering virtually every part of the country. That is your best chance to dispose of old, expired and unwanted medications, and the best way to ensure those potentially dangerous drugs do not end up in the wrong hands.