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How to Dispose of Unused Medication



Most of our medicine cabinets are filled with old outdated medicines or unused drugs, but what should you do with them? While most of us just throw out old or unused drugs, there are many precautions that should be taken before tossing out certain medications. This newsletter will offer different guidelines and information on how to properly dispose of drugs.

What's so Important about How to Dispose Unused Medication²?

First off you may wonder, "why do I need to be so careful?" There are many risks when disposing of unused or expired drugs. A lot of people toss out unused or outdated medications in the trash or flush them down the toilet, but these too can sometimes be dangerous. Some of the drugs components can end up in lakes, streams and water supplies.

In a report from the Associated Press released in early 2008 "A vast array of pharmaceuticals — including antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers and sex hormones — have been found in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans."³

Drug components can get into our water supply in several ways. Some people may flush them down the toilet or pour down the sink, in the case of liquids, or when we take medication our body absorbs parts of the drug and is passed through in our urine or stool and flushed down the toilet. In both cases the water is passed to water treatment plants, but often the drug residue is not fully removed, thus the water may go to our drinking water treatment plants or piped into our faucets.

Although there is some environmental concern, the FDA has not found great adverse human health effects from pharmaceutical residues in the

environment, but disposing of medication properly will help to maintain that this risk stays low. Make sure to read the labels on medications or contact your local pharmacy when concerned about disposing of unused or expired medication.

Guidelines on Disposing Medications¹



- First to figure out how to dispose of any drugs, look on the label or patient information that has come with the drugs. Do not flush them down the toilet unless the instructions say so.
- Mixing the outdated or unused drugs with substances such as coffee grounds or kitty litter can be helpful. This precaution helps to keep children away, as well as people who may intentionally go through your trash searching for medications.
- Put the drugs in a sealable bag to help prevent them leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.
- Where available consumers are encouraged to take advantage of community drug take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Call your city or county government's household trash and recycling service (see blue pages in phone book) to see if a take-back program is available in your community.

Other Helpful Information when discarding unused or outdated medication include:

- Be sure to scratch off any identifying information on pill bottles. This will help protect your privacy.
- When in doubt, contact your pharmacist.
- Also make sure to NEVER give your drugs to someone else!

Please contact your Advantage EAP with any further questions at:

(540) 989-6605 or 800-699-9396

Or visit our website at www.psychhealthroanoke.com

Or our Blog at: <http://psychhealthroanoke.blogspot.com/>

Some helpful online resources:

- 1) <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm>

Contact Us

Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30-5:00pm. Evening hours are available on a limited basis.

(540) 989-6605 or 800-699-9396

Nights and weekends call RESPOND:

(540) 776-1100 or 800-541-9992

Advantage EAP does not necessarily endorse any products or services mentioned

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- 2) http://drugs.about.com/od/howtouseyourmedications/a/drud_disposal.htm
 - 3) http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-03-10-drugs-tap-water_N.htm