

# Leftover Medications: How to dispose of them safely

## Why dispose of unused medications?

When you take prescription medication as your doctor directs, this often means taking it until all the pills are gone. However, if your doctor changes your dose, decides on a different medication, or prescribes a few extra pills, you may have medication left over. You may also have a medicine cabinet full of expired prescription and over-the-counter medications from the past.

**Unused prescription and over-the-counter medication can be dangerous**, especially to children and pets. Unused pain medication can even be a target for theft. This handout tells you how to get rid of your medications safely.

## How NOT to dispose of medications

Many people aren't aware of this, but most medications should **NOT** be poured down the sink, flushed down the toilet, or thrown directly in the trash in their original packaging. Here's why:

- **Small amounts of medication can enter the water system** when medication is poured down the sink or flushed down the toilet, even after the wastewater is treated.
- **Children or pets can find bottles of pills** when they are thrown in the trash. They can also be found by thieves who go through trash cans to find pain medication or get your personal information from the bottles.

## How to get rid of medications safely

Here are 3 ways to dispose of your leftover medications:

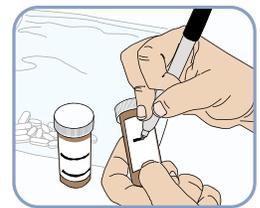
- 1 Drop them off at a drug collection site. Unused pills can be dangerous to leave around. You can find drop-off locations at the following websites:

- Use Only As Directed ([useonlyasdirected.org](http://useonlyasdirected.org))
- U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (<https://apps2.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e1s1>).

It's best not to flush medications down the toilet as they can contaminate the water supply.

- 2 Check to see if your police department has a drug collection program.
- 3 If you are not able to take the medication to a drop-off location, follow the next step for home disposal:

- Pour medications from their bottles into a sealable bag or disposable container with a lid. Remove or mark out any personal information on the bottles. Then throw the original bottles away.



- Mix the medication with something unappetizing, such as kitty litter, coffee grounds, or dirt. This will help keep children or pets from eating the mixture.



- Seal the plastic bag or container and put it in the trash.



## Common questions about medications and the environment

- **How does medication enter our water system?**  
Your body doesn't process all of the medication you take, and the rest ends up in your urine (pee). As a result, that medication can end up in the water system. While you cannot prevent this from happening, you can help limit the problem by disposing of your medications properly.
- **Does the water treatment plant remove all medication from our wastewater?** No. Water treatment plants can leave trace amounts of medication in the water. Humans are not harmed by this small amount.
- **What should I do with expired medications?**  
Medications that are expired (past their "discard by" date) should not be used and may be treated like other leftover medications. Follow the instructions within this guide to properly dispose of expired medications.



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