

How to dispose of unused or expired prescription drugs

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Stashing them in a cabinet is unwise; old medications can become ineffective or unsafe.

(HealthDay)—Many people hold on to extra prescription drugs, but saving old medications is unwise, a pharmacist warns.

"Medications that are expired have passed their half-life, which leads to them being ineffective," said Kimberly Cimorelli, pharmacy manager at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, in Hershey, Pa.

Expired medications can even be dangerous, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration says. Their chemical composition can change and, over time, expired drugs may become less effective or potentially harmful.

Getting rid of old, unused medications can also help ensure children

don't accidentally get their hands on them. Having fewer medications at home can also help prevent mix-ups, the experts pointed out.

"Older people who may be easily confused could take the wrong medication because the unwanted or expired medication wasn't disposed of," Officer Rebecca Kessler, of the Derry Township (Pa.) Police Department, said in a university news release.

Prescription drug abuse is on the rise in the United States, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Removing old medications from the home prevents people from using someone else's prescription, the DEA explained.

Having old prescriptions in the house also makes people a target for those looking to steal drugs, Kessler pointed out.

"Some people who keep their medications have fallen victim to those with a criminal mindset because it is much easier to steal medications from a house or person rather than a pharmacy or hospital," Kessler said.

It may seem smart to flush unwanted medicines down the toilet or throw them in the trash. But this isn't a good idea, she added.

"This causes the medications to end up in our water system and landfills, polluting our water and land," Kessler said.

Instead, she suggested, take advantage of [drug](#) take-back events or drop boxes in your community—safe ways to dispose of medications that are no longer being used. After they are dropped off, medications are incinerated, which can help protect the environment. Many police departments have secure drop-boxes available for use around the clock.

"All someone has to do is walk in, open the box and drop in their

unwanted or expired medications," Kessler said. "They don't have to speak with anyone."

Keep in mind that needles, sprays, inhalers, liquids and creams are usually not accepted at the drop boxes, according to the news release.

The DEA's 10th National Prescription Drug Take-Back takes place throughout September, the news release said.

More information: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has more about the risks associated with taking [expired medications](#).

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