

Time to Clean Out the Medicine Cabinet



For many people, the medicine cabinet becomes a collection of old and new pill bottles. Some may be potent drugs with the potential to be addictive such as opioid pain relievers and stimulants. We don't often think about the risks associated with storing our prescriptions in the traditional medicine cabinet. Here is why you shouldn't keep unused prescriptions and should limit access to current prescriptions (National Safety Council, 2014):

➤ Other people visiting your home may take those medications

People who misuse prescription drugs often forage the medicine cabinets of family members, friends, and others to find drugs. People wanting to attempt suicide may seek out prescription drugs belonging to someone else. Prevent intentional or accidental use by other people by restricting access to those medications. Dispose of old medications and lock up current prescriptions - particularly those with the potential to be addictive (e.g. narcotics/opioids, stimulants).

➤ Some medications become ineffective over time

Some drugs deteriorate over time. Also, heat and moisture typical of the bathroom can more quickly degrade or damage the medications. Unless otherwise instructed, store current prescription medications in a cool, dry place. Dispose of old prescriptions.

➤ Self-medicating with old prescriptions can cause medical problems

Prescribed drugs carry risks that need to be monitored by a doctor.

➤ Old medications can be confused with current prescriptions

Having many similar pill bottles increases the risk of accidentally taking the wrong medication.

Safely Disposing of Leftover Medications

- If disposal instructions are provided with the patient information, then follow those instructions
- Otherwise, do not flush drugs down the toilet or sink as this can pollute the water supply
- Check with your local pharmacy, hospital, or law enforcement agency for a Drug-Take-Back program
- Otherwise, empty pills into a ziplock bag and mix with an undesirable substance (e.g. dirt, used coffee grounds), seal bag, and discard in garbage (FDA, 2015)
- Before discarding the empty bottle, use a permanent marker to mark through the label to protect your personal information



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