

Disposal of Unused Medicines: What You Should Know

Overview

Medicines play an important role in treating many conditions and diseases, but when they are no longer needed it's important to dispose of them properly to avoid harm to others. Below, we list some disposal options and some special disposal instructions for you to consider when throwing out expired, unwanted, or unused medicines.

Medicine Take-Back Programs

Medicine take-back programs for disposal are a good way to remove expired, unwanted, or unused medicines from the home and reduce the chance that others may accidentally take the medicine. Contact your city or county government's household trash and recycling service to see if there is a medicine take-back program in your community and learn about any special rules regarding which medicines can be taken back. You can also talk to your pharmacist to see if he or she knows of other medicine disposal programs in your area.

Disposal in Household Trash

If no medicine take-back program is available in your area, consumers can also follow these simple steps to dispose of most medicines in the household trash:¹

- Mix medicines (do NOT crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds;

- Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag; and

- Throw the container in your household trash

Flushing of Certain Medicines

There is a small number of medicines that may be especially harmful and, in some cases, fatal in a single dose if they are used by someone other than the person the medicine was prescribed for. List of medicines recommended for disposal by flushing. For this reason, a few medicines have specific disposal instructions that indicate they should be flushed down the sink or toilet when they are no longer needed and when they cannot be disposed of through a drug take-back program. When you dispose of these medicines down the sink or toilet, they cannot be accidentally used by children, pets, or anyone else.

You may have also received disposal directions for these medicines when you picked up your prescription. If your medicine is on this list, and you did not receive information containing disposal instructions along with your dispensed prescription, you can find instructions on how to dispose of the medicines at DailyMed, by searching on the drug name, and then looking in one of the following sections of the prescribing information:

FDA remains committed to working with other Federal agencies and medicine manufacturers to develop alternative, safe disposal policies. Below is some additional information about flushing medicine that is no longer needed. If you have additional questions about disposing of your medicine, please contact us at 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332).

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do the medications on the list have flushing directions for disposal?

The medicines on this list of medicines recommended for disposal by flushing are safe and effective when used as prescribed, but they could be especially harmful to a child, pet, or anyone else if taken accidentally. Some of the possible harmful effects include breathing difficulties or heart problems, possibly leading to death. For these reasons, FDA advises that when it isn't possible to return these medicines through a medicine take-back program, flushing these medicines down the sink or toilet is currently the best way to immediately and permanently remove the risk of harm from the home. FDA continues to work with and encourage the manufacturers of these medicines to develop alternative, safe disposal systems.

All other expired, unwanted, or unused medicines should be disposed of by using a medicine take-back program, if available, or by throwing them away in the household trash.

Does flushing the medicines on the list down the toilet or sink drain pose a risk to human health and the environment?

We are aware of recent reports that have noted trace amounts of medicines in the water system. The majority of medicines found in the water system are a result of the body's natural routes of drug elimination (in urine or feces). Scientists, to date, have found no evidence of harmful effects to human health from medicines in the environment.

Disposal of these select, few medicines by flushing contributes only a small fraction of the total amount of medicine found in the water. When a medicine take-back program isn't available, FDA believes that any potential risk to people and the environment from flushing this small, select list of medicines is outweighed by the real possibility of life-threatening risks from accidental ingestion of these medicines.

MEDICINES RECOMMENDED FOR DISPOSAL BY FLUSHING

This list from FDA tells you what expired, unwanted, or unused medicines you should flush down the sink or toilet to help prevent danger to people and pets in the home. Flushing these medicines will get rid of them right away and help keep your family and pets safe.

FDA continually evaluates medicines for safety risks and will update the list as needed.

Medicine	Active Ingredient
Abstral, tablets (sublingual)	Fentanyl
Actiq, oral transmucosal lozenge *	Fentanyl Citrate
Avinza, capsules (extended release)	Morphine Sulfate
Daytrana, transdermal patch system	Methylphenidate
Demerol, tablets *	Meperidine Hydrochloride
Demerol, oral solution *	Meperidine Hydrochloride
Diastat/Diastat AcuDial, rectal gel	Diazepam
Dilaudid, tablets *	Hydromorphone Hydrochloride
Dilaudid, oral liquid *	Hydromorphone Hydrochloride
Dolophine Hydrochloride, tablets *	Methadone Hydrochloride
Duragesic, patch (extended release) *	Fentanyl
Embeda, capsules (extended release)	Morphine Sulfate; Naltrexone Hydrochloride
Exalgo, tablets (extended release)	Hydromorphone Hydrochloride
Fentora, tablets (buccal)	Fentanyl Citrate
Kadian, capsules (extended release)	Morphine Sulfate
Methadone Hydrochloride, oral solution *	Methadone Hydrochloride
Methadose, tablets *	Methadone Hydrochloride
Morphine Sulfate, tablets (immediate release) *	Morphine Sulfate
Morphine Sulfate, oral solution *	Morphine Sulfate
MS Contin, tablets (extended release) *	Morphine Sulfate
Nucynta ER, tablets (extended release)	Tapentadol
Onsolis, soluble film (buccal)	Fentanyl Citrate
Opana, tablets (immediate release)	Oxymorphone Hydrochloride
Opana ER, tablets (extended release)	Oxymorphone Hydrochloride
Oramorph SR, tablets (sustained release)	Morphine Sulfate
Oxecta, tablets (immediate release)	Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Oxycodone Hydrochloride, capsules	Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Oxycodone Hydrochloride, oral solution	Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Oxycontin, tablets (extended release) *	Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Percocet, tablets *	Acetaminophen; Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Percodan, tablets *	Aspirin; Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Xyrem, oral solution	Sodium Oxybate

*These medicines have generic versions available or are only available in generic formulations.

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1Consumers are advised to check their local laws and ordinances to make sure medicines can legally be disposed of with their household trash.

For specific drug product labeling information, go to [DailyMed](#) or [Drugs@FDA](#).