

Spring Cleaning for Your Medicine Cabinet



DON'T TRASH YOUR MEDS

Disposing of medications in the trash isn't a great idea. Kids and pets can get into the drugs – exposing them to poisoning dangers. Drugs disposed of in landfills can also run off into water supplies. Ask your pharmacist if they have a medicine return program or call your city about hazardous waste drop-offs that will accept medications. If you do need to dump the drugs in the trash, mix them in cat litter, sawdust or other waste material.



DISCARD EXPIRED DRUGS

There's a lot of controversy over whether it's okay to take expired drugs or not – and how long drugs are good after their expiration date. But depending on the drug's make-up, it can either lose or gain potency over time becoming either ineffective or dangerous. Either way, if you've got expired medicines, it's best to get rid of them to protect your health.



UPDATE YOUR FIRST AID KIT

Take a good look at your family's first aid kit at least once a year. It's easy to pull things out when you need them and think about replacing them later – catching you short if you have a mini-emergency. Check any medicines in the kit (chuck those that are expired) and make sure you've got antiseptic, bandages, tourniquets and the basics to care for someone if they get injured.



STORE MEDICINE PROPERLY

You might be surprised that the place most of us store our medicines – the bathroom – is probably the worst place in your home to keep them. The humidity and heat in most bathrooms can make drugs degrade more quickly. Get a locking container and keep the medicines in your kitchen or bedroom instead – well out of reach of any children who live in or visit your home.



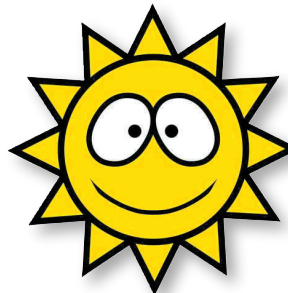
TOSS UNFINISHED DRUGS

When your doctor gives you a prescription, in general, you should finish the prescription – especially if it's for an antibiotic. Even if you start to feel better, you need to complete the entire course in order to effectively kill the bacteria (one reason people often have infections that recur). If you have a medication that you haven't completed, ask your doctor if it's okay to keep it to take at a later time if you need it.



KEEP THE WATER DRUG-FREE

There have been several reports in the news in recent months of trace amounts (very small) of commonly used drugs being found in city water supplies including antibiotics, anticonvulsants and sex hormones. While even the FDA – until recently – recommended flushing some old or unused medications – municipalities are asking that you dispose of drugs in other, more environmentally friendly ways like city hazardous waste drop-offs or pharmacy return programs.



TOSS LAST SUMMER'S SUNSCREEN

Remember that sunscreen has active ingredients that can degrade just like other over-the-counter medications. Since we tend not to use enough sunscreen when we apply it, there's usually plenty left over at the end of the summer. You'll want to keep some around for every day application, but at the beginning of the summer, toss out any old sunscreens and stock up again.



ASK YOUR DOCTOR WHAT TO DO

If you have any questions about what to do with an old medication, whether you should keep an unused prescription or other medication questions, don't hesitate to ask your doctor. You should take a list of your medications to every visit so your doctor can remove any you shouldn't be taking and check to see if you could be in danger of any interactions. If you have a question about a medication, take the original bottle so your doctor can exactly what was prescribed.