

How to Dispose of Prescription Medicines & Over-the-Counter Products

Flushing medications down the toilet or sink causes water pollution, impacts drinking water and has adverse effects on septic systems, fish and aquatic wildlife. The safe way to dispose of medications and over the counter products is to put them in the trash.

Here's how to do it:

Keep the medication in its original container. To protect privacy and discourage misuse of the medication, cross out the patient's name with a permanent marker or duct tap or remove the label. (Chemotherapy drugs may require special handling. Work with your healthcare provider on proper disposal for this type of medication.

Modify the medications to discourage consumption:

- For solid medications, such as pills or capsules, add a small amount of water to partially dissolve them.
- For liquid medications add enough table salt, flour or nontoxic powdered spices to make a pungent unsightly mixture that discourages anyone from eating it.
- For blister packs: wrap the blister packages containing pills in multiple layers of duct tape.

Seal and conceal.

- Tape the medication container lid shut with packing or duct tape. Place it inside a non-transparent bag or container such as an empty yogurt or margarine tub to ensure that the contents cannot be seen.
- Do not conceal medicines in food products because animals could inadvertently consume them.
- Discard the container in your trash cart. DO NOT put the container in your recycling cart.

Ampoules, Vials, & IV Bags:

- DO NOT empty or open the bags.
- Wrap the container with tape to minimize breakage, then place in an opaque plastic container. Wrap the outside of the container or bag with additional duct or shipping tape to prevent leakage to further obscure the contents.
- Dispose of in the trash. DO NOT put the container in your recycling cart!

Chemotherapy Drugs:

Some chemotherapy drugs may have special disposal requirements. Ask your health care provider about property disposal.

Mercury thermometers:

Bring to a household hazardous waste collection day. DO NOT put the thermometers in your trash.

Sharps (needles & lancets): Place in a puncture proof hard plastic container with a cap on cap such as a bleach or detergent bottle. Seal the container with the original lid and wrap with duct tape. Place the tightly sealed container in a bag and pit it in your trash.