

# How do I Dispose of Expired Medicine?

Do you have old or expired medicines languishing in your medicine cabinet? If so, you're not the only one. Just about all of us have items on our shelves that are no longer useful. The problem is we don't know what to do with them. Flush them down the toilet? Throw them in the [garbage](#)? What is the safest option?

Many people have and will continue to throw expired medication in the garbage. We now know, however, that medicine can actually get into our soil, creating an environmental hazard. Others tend to flush any outdated drugs. This was considered the best method because there was no danger of children and pets accidentally ingesting pills. Flushing medicine also presents an environmental hazard. In fact, traces of certain medications have actually been found in water supplies.

So, if we can't throw away expired medicine and we can't flush them, what can we do to ensure they're properly disposed of?

There are several options. The first is to contact your pharmacy. Many pharmacies now have drug recycling programs in place. Some take it back at any time, others hold periodic drives to collect expired medicine. Either way, they'll take back your expired medication and see to it that they're disposed of in the proper manner. If your pharmacist doesn't take back your old drugs, he or she may have an alternate recommendation. If he or she has no advice, call around. Another pharmacy in your area might take expired medicine.

Another option is to take any old pills and pulverize them. Return them to their child-safe container and place the container inside several thick zip lock plastic bags or a thick plastic container. This can now be tossed into the household trash. There are several problems with this method, however. Many people don't like to waste their bags and containers. Plastic doesn't always degrade so easily if at all. In addition, there's still a chance the medicine can leak out and present a hazard. Besides, one thing we don't need is more landfill.

Since expired medicine is considered hazardous waste, it stands to reason it should be disposed of as such. Contact your local hazardous waste facility to see its recommendations. If your city or town has a website, there are probably instructions on how to dispose of hazardous waste. See if medicine is listed. If it is, you can either bring it to the hazardous waste site or set it out for pick up on the designated date. Even if nothing is listed on the website, you can call the facility to either see if this is something it handles, or if it has a recommendation.

Lastly, there are organizations that donate expired medicine to third world countries. Even though your medicine may have expired, it may still be good long past the printed date. (Only professionals can determine this.) Rather than have it waste away in your medicine cabinet, why not donate it where it will be put to good use? An internet search will provide you with such organizations.

If you have medicine sitting around long past its expiration date, please be mindful of all the options you have before you dump it in the trash or flush it down the toilet.