

Clean out your medicine cabinet the safe way

When was the last time you cleaned out your medicine cabinet? You may not even realize that you have unneeded, expired or recalled products. Leaving expired and unused drugs in your medicine cabinet “just in case” can put anyone in your home, including children and pets, at risk for accidental ingestion, misuse, or overdose.

So it's time to take action. Protect your family and clean it out!

- Clean out regularly. Make sure you schedule a medicine cabinet cleanout every six months.
- Check the expiration dates of all the products in your medicine cabinet. Don't forget about makeup and sunscreen. They can expire as well.
- Check the FDA website to search for recalled products and find out if you have any in your medicine cabinet.
- Store your drugs correctly. When you know which prescription and over-the-counter medications you're keeping, don't put those in a medicine cabinet in the bathroom where heat and moisture can degrade them and potentially make them less potent. A better spot is in a kitchen cabinet, away from the stove.

So what should you toss? Though some pills can keep for a decade or even longer, medical experts say you should dispose of any medications that are more than a year past their expiration date. One exception: the antibiotic Tetracycline can become toxic after its expiration date and cause kidney problems. So throw out any unused capsules on or before the expiration date.

But DO NOT throw out your medicine like you do any other trash and do not flush them down the toilet. Instead do one of these three things:

- Dispose your medication in drug drop-off boxes that are located at the West Hollywood Sheriff's Station at 780 N. San Vicente Blvd. The drug drop-off boxes are located in the station's parking lot. These drop-off boxes look like a traditional mailbox you would find on a sidewalk. This program was developed to provide a unique opportunity for residents to safely and anonymously drop-off expired or unused prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, syringes or sharps, and any other controlled substances. The Sheriff's Department is participating in this program to ensure that residents have a safe way to dispose of these items.
- Bring your medication to the pharmacy. Many pharmacies accept and safely dispose of over-the-counter and prescription medications. Before you drop them off, remove all identifying information on bottle labels to protect your privacy. Two online resources at www.disposemy meds.org and www.sharpsinc.com/locations can help you find a location near you.

- If you don't live near a pharmacy that will accept your medications, mix them with cat litter, coffee grounds or sawdust, put the mixture in a sealed plastic bag and then toss it in the trash. Collect the empty prescription bottles and put them in your recycling bin.

If you have additional questions about proper disposal, talk to your pharmacist.