How to Properly Dispose of Unwanted or Unused Medicines

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued an overview on prescription medications and the role they play in treating many conditions and diseases. When medications are no longer needed it’s important to dispose of them correctly to avoid harm to others. The Drug Enforcement Administration has scheduled a National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day in every state. This is a great opportunity for those who wish to safely dispose of unwanted and unused prescription drugs. The USDA recommends visiting this website http://www.justice.gov/dea/index.shtml to find the collection site nearest you.

Listed below are disposal options to consider when throwing out expired, unwanted, or unused medicines. If for whatever reason you cannot make it to your collection site, these steps are recommended for disposing of medicines:

1. Take your prescription drugs out of their original containers.
2. Put the mixture into a disposable container with a lid, such as an empty margarine tub, or into a sealable bag.
3. Mix drugs with an undesirable substance, such as cat litter or used coffee grounds.
4. Conceal or remove any personal information, including Rx number, on the empty containers by covering it with permanent marker or duct tape, or by scratching it off.
5. The sealed container with the drug mixture, and the empty drug containers, can now be placed in the trash.

According to the FDA, there are a few medications that have specific disposal instructions that indicate flushing down the sink or toilet when they are no longer needed. For a complete list of medicines recommended for disposal by flushing visit the “Disposal of unused medicines: what you should know” page at www.fda.gov
Points to remember:

- **Don’t**: Flush expired or unwanted prescription and over-the-counter drugs down the toilet or drain unless the label or accompanying patient information specifically instructs you to do so.
- **Do**: Return unwanted or expired prescription and over-the-counter drugs to a drug take-back program or follow the steps for household disposal below.

Properly disposing of unwanted or expired medicines prevents poisoning of children and pets, deters misuse by teenagers or adults, and prevents complications from accidentally taking the wrong medicine or a medicine that is too old to work well. By not flushing unwanted medicines down the toilet, you will prevent medicines from entering streams and rivers. Water treatment plants are generally not equipped to routinely remove medicines.

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