

**News Capsule**  
**Issue 2 – August 2009**

Medication Storage and Disposal – What Should I Do?

Everyone has places at home where they like to keep medications. Some store their medications in the bathroom or on a window ledge. Maybe medications are stored on the counter where anyone could reach them. How long should you keep your medicines -- six months, a year, five years? Proper medication storage and disposal is important to make sure you receive the most benefit from medications and they do not cause harm.

Most medications should be stored in an area that is dry, dark and at room temperature (about 68-77°F). Bathrooms and window ledges expose medications to heat, light, and moisture, which can cause them to break down and not work as well. Places like kitchen cabinets, night stands, or desk drawers are better places to store medications. However, read the label or insert that comes with your medication to see if it has special storage needs. For example, some oral antibiotics need to be refrigerated. Also, if there are children or pets around, medications should be kept in a child-proof container and in a higher area where they cannot be easily reached. Locking medications in a drawer or cabinet is another way to keep medications out of reach.

Along with proper storage, knowing when to throw away your medicines is important. All medications should be properly disposed of after the expiration date on the bottle, vial, or device has passed. This is very important for certain medications such as EpiPens, antibiotics, and heart and seizure medications. These medicines might not work or cause harm if used past the expiration date. Other medications like inhalers, insulin, and nitroglycerin might need to be disposed of before the expiration date, depending on use and how they were kept. Read medication leaflets or guides or ask your pharmacist if you have questions about when medications should be discarded. Also, properly dispose of any medication that is discolored, has an unusual odor, or is broken, even if it has not expired. When in doubt, throw it out.

If you have medications that have expired or need to be discarded, proper disposal of these medicines is necessary. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, only a few medications should be flushed down the toilet. These medications are: Actiq (fentanyl), Duragesic Transdermal System (fentanyl), Fentora (fentanyl buccal tablet), Daytrana Transdermal Patch (methylphenidate), , OxyContin Tablets(oxycodone), Avinza Capsules (morphine), Baraclude Tablets (entecavir), Reyataz Capsules (atazanavir), Tequin Tablets (gatifloxacin), Zerit for Oral Solution (stavudine), Meperidine Tablets, Percocet (Oxycodone plus Acetaminophen), Xyrem (Sodium Oxybate)(1). Looking at the medication label for discarding instructions is the first step in proper disposal. If there are instructions, follow the directions given. If no instructions are provided, remove the medication from the original bottle and place it in a sealable bag, can, or another container that will not break or leak (2,3). If the medication is a tablet or capsule, crush the medication in the container then add water and mix (3). Next, add used

coffee grounds, kitty litter, or saw dust and place it in the trash (2,3). To protect your identity, remove or scratch out all personal information on prescription bottles before throwing them in the trash (2,3).

Appropriate disposal of needles is just as important as proper medication disposal. Needles and lancets should not be thrown into the trash since other people could easily be hurt, even if the needle is recapped. Needles should be disposed of in a proper sharps container, like a BD Home Sharps Container, that can be purchased at most pharmacies. These red containers can then be dropped off at collection sites in the community, such as doctors' offices, hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, or the local health department. Contact these places to see if they accept the containers. Another option is purchasing sharps containers that can be mailed back to the company for disposal (4). Kendall SharpSafety Mail Away Sharps Disposal is an example of one of these companies. They can be phoned at 1-800-962-9888 for more information on their product (5). A third option is using home needle destruction devices that will either clip, melt, or burn the needle. After the needle is destroyed, the syringe can be thrown in the trash (4). Needle destruction devices can also be purchased at most pharmacies. It does not matter what needle disposal method you use, as long as you discard the needles properly.

Proper storage helps you get the most out of your medicines. The proper disposal of expired medications and needles protects children, pets, and others from accidentally taking medicines that could harm them or from being stuck with used needles. If you have any further questions about medication storage or disposal, ask your pharmacist.

#### References

- 1) Breathing Partner's Notebook: SMARxT Disposal. 35:1. Available at: <http://www.healthylungs.org/site/dmd/BPNMar2009.pdf>. Accessed August 24, 2009.
- 2) Food and Drug Administration. How to Dispose of Unused Medications [updated June 23, 2008]. Available at: <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm>. Accessed on August 21, 2009.
- 3) SMARxT Disposal. Responsible medication disposal safeguards lives and protects the environment. Available at: <http://www.smarxtdisposal.net/index.html>. Accessed on August 21, 2009.
- 4) Environmental Protection Agency. Community options for safe needle disposal [updated October 2004]. Available at: <http://www.epa.gov/waste/nonhaz/industrial/medical/med-govt.pdf>. Accessed on August 21, 2009.
- 5) Safe Needle Disposal. Kendall SharpSafety Mail Away Sharps Disposal. Available at: <http://www.safeneedledisposal.org/product/17.html>. Accessed on August 21, 2009.