

Your Medicine Cabinet and Drug Safety



Expiration Date vs. Shelf Life

Shelf life usually refers to the time between a medication's manufacture date and its expiration date. But a drug's shelf life can be altered by storage conditions—temperature, humidity, light, and even whether or not the medication is stored in its original container.

While the expiration date indicates how long a manufacturer guarantees safety and full potency of a medication, some drugs are more stable than others. Ask your pharmacist before using any medicine past its listed expiration date. Some medications lose potency, while others can become dangerous or even toxic past the expiration date.

Good Safety Habits

Keep a list of all of your medications, along with potential side effects and drug interactions. (Let your doctor know if you are experiencing any side effects.) This should include any over-the-counter (OTC) medications as well as vitamins, minerals and herbal supplements.

Take this list with you on doctor visits and to your pharmacist so it can be reviewed any time you are prescribed any additional medications or supplements. Also be sure to ask about any potential food interactions with any new or existing medications.

Always check to be sure the medication the doctor ordered is the Rx you received.

Use the alarm on your phone to remind you to take your medications on schedule, or use a pill box that organizes your medicines along with a time schedule taped to the back of the organizer.


Disposing Old Medications

It's important to carefully and properly discard any old medications, both prescribed and OTC varieties. Never “flush” medications (unless specifically directed to do so) to prevent them from entering the general water supply.

Many communities offer a “take back” program, where you can safely drop off any unused medications. This is the best option. Call your local law enforcement agency and ask if they sponsor or can direct you to such a program. Your local waste management organization may also have this information.

If your only option is to dispose of medicines in regular household trash, you should add pills (left whole) to unseemly waste, such as kitchen slop, used cat litter, used coffee grounds, etc.

When disposing of empty medicine bottles, **be sure to eliminate your personal information, as well as the type of medication, to prevent bottles from being used to obtain medication illegally.**



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