

DISPOSING OF UNUSED PAIN MEDICATION



Opioid medications are commonly prescribed to people and their pets for pain treatment. It is essential to properly dispose of expired or unused medications to prevent harm to the environment, accidental poisonings, and drug misuse.

Did you know that over half of the people who use prescribed medications for non-medical purposes report getting them from family or friends to whom the medicines had been prescribed? [1]

WHAT CAN YOU DO? USE. STORE. DISPOSE



USE OPIOIDS SAFELY. When prescribed by a healthcare provider, opioid medications can help manage pain. It is important to use your medication responsibly. Responsible use includes following all prescription instructions for use, safe storage, and proper medication disposal.



STORE YOUR MEDICATION SECURELY. This is vital in keeping your guests and family safe. Medication should always be stored in a secure location that is out-of-sight and not accessible to children or animals. Use a locking cabinet or a secured lockbox to keep medication out of reach of unwanted hands.



DISPOSE OF EXTRA MEDICATION RESPONSIBLY. You may have prescription medicine that you didn't use. You can take expired or unused medication to authorized collectors. By removing the medication from your home, you can reduce misuse and accidental poisonings.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration sponsors take-back programs for prescription medications. Authorized collectors may include local law enforcement agencies, hospitals, and pharmacies.

Ways to safely dispose of unused and expired medications include:

- **Take-back events:** communities will often designate specific days with a specified location to bring in unused prescription medication for disposal. Learn more about Take Back Day in Tennessee from the [Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Use Services](#).



- **Disposal by mail:** Some pharmacies and local health departments (for example, in [California](#) and [Vermont](#)) offer mail-back envelopes for prescription drug disposal as requested. COURAGE of the East TN Rural Health Consortium partnered with several healthcare providers within our service counties in East Tennessee to distribute mail-back envelopes to patients with opioid prescriptions. Ask your provider if they provide mail-back envelopes for medication disposal.



- **Collection receptacles:** Call your local law enforcement agency to see if there are any in your community. [Find a Tennessee location nearest to you on this map](#).



- **Down the drain.** Many unused opioid medications can be easily disposed of by flushing down your household toilet or sink. Click here for a list of [FDA-approved "flushable" medications](#).



- **Mix with substances.** If your unused medication doesn't appear on the list AND you cannot get to a drop-off site, you can dispose of it by mixing it with an undesirable substance (e.g., cat litter or used coffee grounds). Place the mixture in a sealed bag and throw the bag in your household garbage.



If you have any concerns about opioid usage, storage, and disposal, discuss them with your doctor, pharmacist, or local public health office. Returning medications has no negative consequences, and you are doing your part to protect your community. Watch [this FDA video](#) for more information on how to safely dispose of medications!

2 U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2021, April 21). Where and How to Dispose of Unused Medicines. <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/where-and-how-dispose-unused-medicines>