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Disposal by Flushing of Certain Unused Medicines: What You Should Know

Medicines play an important role in treating certain conditions and diseases, but they must be taken with care. Unused portions of these medicines must be disposed of properly to avoid harm. Almost all medicines can be thrown away in the household trash after mixing them with some unpalatable substance (e.g., coffee grounds) and sealing them in a container.

However, certain medicines may be especially harmful and, in some cases, fatal in a single dose if they are used by someone other than the person the medicine was prescribed for. For this reason, a few medicines have special disposal directions that indicate they should be flushed down the sink or toilet after the medicine is no longer needed. If you dispose of these medicines down the sink or toilet, they cannot be accidentally used by children, pets, or anybody else.

You may have also received disposal directions for these medicines when you picked up your prescription. If your medicine is on this list, and you did not receive information on disposal with your prescription, you can find directions on how to dispose of the medicines at DailyMed. After you search on the drug name, the disposal information for these medicines can be found in one of the following sections of the prescribing information:

- Information for Patients and Caregivers
- Patient Information
- Patient Counseling Information
- Safety and Handling Instructions
- Medication Guide

It is important to note that disposal by flushing is not recommended for the vast majority of medicines. Unused or expired medicines that do not have flushing directions in the label can be disposed of safely in the household trash by:

1. Mixing them with something that will hide the medicine or make it unappealing, such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds.
2. Placing the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag.
3. Throwing the container in your household trash.

Below is some additional information about the disposal of medicine that is no longer needed. If you have additional questions about disposing of your medicine, please contact us at 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332).

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do the medications on the list have flushing directions for disposal?

The medicines on this list of medicines recommended for disposal by flushing are safe and effective when used as prescribed, but they could be especially harmful to a child, pet, or anyone else if taken accidentally. Some of the possible harmful effects include breathing difficulties or heart problems, possibly leading to death. For these reasons, FDA advises that flushing these medicines down the sink or toilet is currently the best way to immediately and permanently remove the risk of harm from the home.

FDA continues to work with and encourage the manufacturers of these medicines to develop alternative, safe disposal systems.

How should you dispose of medicines not found on the list?

Do not flush all medicines down the toilet. The FDA recommends that most medicines be disposed of in the household trash after mixing them with some unpalatable substance (e.g., coffee grounds) and sealing them in a container. Unused portions of medicines must be disposed of properly to avoid harm.

Drug take-back programs for disposal can be another good way to remove unwanted or expired medicines from the home and reduce the chance that someone may accidentally take the medicine. Contact your city or county government's household trash and recycling service to see if there is a take-back program in your community and if there are any rules about which medicines can be taken back. You can also talk to your pharmacist to see if he or she knows of other medicine disposal programs in your area.

Does flushing the medicines on the list down the toilet or sink drain pose a risk to human health and the environment?

We are aware of recent reports that have noted trace amounts of medicines in the water system. The majority of medicines found in the water system are a result of the body's natural routes of drug elimination (in urine or feces). Scientists, to date, have found no evidence of harmful effects to human health from medicines in the environment.

Disposal of these select, few medicines by flushing contributes only a small fraction of the total amount medicine found in the water. FDA believes that any potential risk to people and the environment from flushing this small, select list of medicines is outweighed by the real possibility of life-threatening risks from accidental ingestion of these medicines.

MEDICINES RECOMMENDED FOR DISPOSAL BY FLUSHING

This list from FDA tells you what unused or expired medicines you should flush down the sink or toilet to help prevent danger to people and pets in the home. Flushing these medicines will get rid of them right away and help keep your family and pets safe.

FDA continually evaluates medicines for safety risks and will update the list as needed.

<i>Medicine</i>	<i>Active Ingredient</i>
Actiq , oral transmucosal lozenge	Fentanyl Citrate
Avinza , capsules (extended release)	Morphine Sulfate
Daytrana , transdermal patch system	Methylphenidate
Demerol , tablets *	Meperidine Hydrochloride
Demerol , oral solution *	Meperidine Hydrochloride
Diastat/Diastat AcuDial , rectal gel	Diazepam
Dilaudid , tablets *	Hydromorphone Hydrochloride
Dilaudid , oral liquid *	Hydromorphone Hydrochloride
Dolophine Hydrochloride , tablets *	Methadone Hydrochloride
Duragesic , patch (extended release) *	Fentanyl
Embeda , capsules (extended release)	Morphine Sulfate; Naltrexone Hydrochloride
Fentora , tablets (buccal)	Fentanyl Citrate
Kadian , capsules (extended release)	Morphine Sulfate
Methadone Hydrochloride , oral solution *	Methadone Hydrochloride
Methadose , tablets *	Methadone Hydrochloride
Morphine Sulfate , tablets (immediate release) *	Morphine Sulfate
Morphine Sulfate , oral solution *	Morphine Sulfate
MS Contin , tablets (extended release) *	Morphine Sulfate
Onsolis , soluble film (buccal)	Fentanyl Citrate
Opana , tablets (immediate release)	Oxymorphone Hydrochloride
Opana ER , tablets (extended release)	Oxymorphone Hydrochloride
Oramorph SR , tablets (sustained release)	Morphine Sulfate
Oxycontin , tablets (extended release) *	Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Percocet , tablets *	Acetaminophen; Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Percodan , tablets *	Aspirin; Oxycodone Hydrochloride
Xyrem , oral solution	Sodium Oxybate

*These medicines have generic versions available or are only available in generic formulations.

For specific drug product labeling information, go to DailyMed or Drugs@FDA.

Additional Resources

- New FDA Web Page Lists Disposal Instructions for Select Medicines
- How to Dispose of Unused Medicines
- Medication Disposal: Questions and Answers
- Federal Guidelines for Proper Disposal of Drugs
- Environmental Protection Agency

Contact Us

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