



Disposing of Your Unused Medications

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With the increasing number of medications available to treat a multitude of conditions, it is understandable that many of us have a medicine cabinet full of unused and expired medications. These leftover, unused drugs can cause many problems from diversion to proper disposal. In recent headlines, we learned that the medications we no longer use or need are now considered a toxic form of hazardous household waste.

Most of these headlines highlighted the medications we use, but the problem is much, much more than just prescriptions. These hazardous household wastes are known collectively as Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products (PPCPs). This group is comprised of a very broad and diverse collection of thousands of chemical substances.

Included in are prescription, veterinary, and over-the-counter (OTC) therapeutic drugs, fragrances, cosmetics, sun-screen agents, diagnostic agents, supplements, growth enhancing chemicals used in livestock operations and many, many others. All of these agents can be a problem to our environment and to our water supply.

For more than a decade, studies have shown that prescription drugs and their by-products are finding their way into our water supply, affecting the drinking water of millions of Americans. A 2002 U.S. Geological Survey study found that 80 percent of the streams and rivers tested had measurable amounts of drugs, such as steroids and reproductive hormones.

How do these drugs get into the water? We take our medications; they are eliminated from our body into the water supply as the drug itself or an altered version of the drug. There is not really a way to change this process.

In the past, the public was directed to flush or wash unused, unneeded drugs down drains. We have also been advised to alter them and place the "drug mix" in a sealed container, place it for pick up to be taken to a landfill. With

this disposal method there is still the possibility of children and animals getting into drug residue tossed in the trash. After these disposal containers get to the landfill, residue of the disposal container can seep into our groundwater.

Neither of these disposal methods are the most acceptable way to dispose of our unneeded, unused medications. Scientists are finding everything from Aspirin to Zoloft in our streams, rivers, and lakes. Drugs can kill helpful bacteria in septic systems and pass largely untouched through sewage treatment plants.

In my January column article, I advised seniors and/or their caregivers to list their current medications (prescription, non-prescription and over the counter medications). This should be the first step in organizing and cleaning the medication cabinet. Resolving to clean out your medicine cabinet this year is a good idea. Hanging on to unused medications can increase the chances of taking the wrong medicine or one that has lost its potency. Keeping unused medications readily available may also result in your medications being diverted by those who might have access to your medications while they are in your home. We have all seen the TV ads with the teenager describing the source of each of the meds he has in a pocket container, "hip replacement, sprained ankle, etc."

While, state regulations prohibit the return of medication to pharmacies and samples are not returned to the physicians' offices, we **can** change the way we dispose of the drugs that we have not taken. There are innovative drug disposal programs where citizens can drop off unused, unneeded or expired medications. Communities, such as Louisville Metro have developed take-back programs or community solid-waste programs that allow the public to bring these types of drugs to a central location. The collected medications will then be incinerated at a facility that is specially licensed and controlled to carry out such destruction. This method is the best way to dispose of unused medications since this regulated method has minimal effects on our environment.

The upcoming **Expired Drug Toss** is such a community wide take-back program. This is the third year that this greatly needed service has been organized by various organizations in TRIAD¹. Six sites throughout the county

have been scheduled from May 20th to 22nd to accept medications for disposal. (See the schedule below).

The Expired Drug Toss will accept

- expired drugs, bulk or loose tablets and capsules
- unsealed syrups, drops, sprays, tubes of cream and ointments
- drugs not stored properly
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To speed up the drop off process be sure to mark out any personal identification information on the original containers. Place all your containers in a suitable bag for dropping off at each site. A drive through will be set up so that you will not need to even get out of your car. Louisville Metro Police will be available at each site to supervise the receipt of the expired meds.

5/20 (Tuesday)	St. Denis Church 4205 Cane Run Road	9:30 am to 11:30 am
	Franciscan Health Care Center 3625 Fern Valley Road	1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
5/21 (Wednesday)	Christopher East Christopher 4200 Browns Lane	9:30 am to 11:30 am
	Brookside Senior Living 200 Brookside Drive	1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
5/22 (Thursday)	Christian Care Communities 960 South 4th St	9:30 am to 11:30 am
	Sun Valley Community Center 6505 Bethany Lane	1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Sponsors: AARP Kentucky, Catholic Charities, Community Action Partnership, KIPDA (Kentucky Indiana Planning & Development Agency), Louisville Metro Police, Louisville Metro Solid Waste, Senior Pharmacy Solutions and TRIAD