



 [Return to Web version](#)

Safe Storage, and Disposal of Opioid Drugs

Safe Storage, and Disposal of Opioid Drugs

How do I safely store opioids?

The abuse of opioids is a significant public safety concern. Teenagers and young adults most commonly get these medicines from their own medicine cabinets, where another family member has stored them.

All opioids should be stored in their original packaging inside a locked cabinet, lockbox, or a location where others cannot easily access them.

Carefully note when and how much medicine you take in order to keep track of how much is left.

If you think that someone has taken your medicine, contact the police immediately to file a report.

How do I safely dispose of opioids?

Many communities have medicine take-back programs. Ask your family doctor for more information or visit the [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's Office of Diversion Control](#) to learn more. You can also call your local waste management company to ask if there is a take-back program in your community.

Opioids -- both pill and patch forms -- often come with instructions for flushing unused medicine to prevent unintentional use or illegal abuse.

The FDA recommends always flushing used and leftover pain patches down the toilet. Even used patches still have enough medicine in them to be dangerous or deadly to pets, children, and others with a low tolerance for opioids. To dispose of a pain patch, fold it in half so the sticky sides stick together, then flush it immediately.

What if my community doesn't allow flushing unused pills?

If your community warns against flushing unused medicines down the toilet, take the following steps instead:

- Remove personal information from the prescription label and keep the medicine in its original container.
- Add water to solid pills. Also add a nontoxic and unpalatable substance, such as coffee grounds or kitty litter to the container.
- Seal the container with duct tape and place inside a second, unmarked container, then place in the trash.

If you are not sure about how to dispose of a medicine, ask your doctor.

Do's and Don'ts of Opioid Use

Do

- Always remove an old pain patch before applying a new patch.
- Talk to your doctor before changing the dosage of your pain reliever. If you miss a dose, do not take two doses without discussing this with your doctor.
- Watch for signs of overmedication and ask others to watch you for those signs.
- When taking liquid doses, use an accurate measuring device and measure out only the prescribed amount.

Don't

- Do not share opioids.
- Do not combine opioids with alcohol or street drugs.
- Never cut, chew, crush, or dissolve opioid tablets or capsules.
- Never take your pain reliever while in the dark to avoid taking the wrong pill or amount.
- Never cut or fold a pain patch you plan to use.
- Never apply more than one pain patch at a time.
- Never suck on a pain patch.
- Do not expose a pain patch to a source of heat, such as a heating pad, while the patch is attached to your skin.
- Do not change pain patches too often.
- Do not drive a car or use heavy machinery until you have become used to the medicine's effects.

Bibliography

Food and Drug Administration. [Safe Disposal of Medicines](#). Accessed February 13, 2013

Opioids911-Safety. [How can I prevent problems with opioids?](#). Accessed January 23, 2013

Pharmacology of Opioids in the Treatment of Chronic Pain Syndromes by Vallejo R, Barkin RL, Wang VC. (*Pain Physician* July 01, 2011)

Project Lazarus. [Community-based Overdose Prevention from North Carolina and the Community Care Chronic Pain Initiative](#). Accessed February 13, 2013

Written by familydoctor.org editorial staff

Created: 07/13