

Storing Medications Safely

I have heard that the bathroom medicine cabinet is not the best place to store medications. Is this true?

Yes, the medication in a closed medication cabinet can be exposed to humidity every time you shower or bathe. In addition, the temperature may be higher than recommended for storage. Both of these conditions can cause medications to degrade and become less effective. This is especially true for tablets and capsules where unnecessary exposure to heat and moisture can cause loss of potency prior to expiration. If you must keep medications in the bathroom, keep the containers tightly closed and don't repack them.

The information sheet you receive from the pharmacy has storing requirements for each medication. Follow the storage information carefully and make sure to refrigerate those medications that need it.

What are some good places to store medications?

Instead of the bathroom medicine chest, store medications in a cool, dry place away from bright windows or rooms affected by outside weather. Find a place you are in at the same time every day so it will become part of your daily routine to take your medications as prescribed. A dresser drawer or kitchen cabinet often works well. If medicines are stored in the kitchen, make sure they are away from the stove, sink and any heat-releasing appliances.

Here are some additional tips for proper and safe medication storage:

- Store all drugs out of harm's way. That includes keeping them out of reach of children or anyone else who might misuse them.
- Post a note by your phone with the phone number for poison control, your healthcare provider and pharmacy as a safety precaution.
- Don't leave the cotton plug in a medication vial. Doing so can draw moisture into the container.

What is the best container for pills?

For most of us, medications should be stored in the labeled container that comes from the pharmacy. Unless you have physical issues that do not allow you to open a childproof container, they are the safest. The label on the original container also allows you to identify the medication, the way you should



take it, and when it expires.

If there are ever children in your home, medications should be kept up high and out of sight. This includes vitamins and supplements. The bright colors can be very attractive to a child.

How long should I keep my medication?

Check the expiration date and if it has passed, throw the medication away. Dispose of medications that have been discontinued, antibiotics that have not been completed, or any medication that is obviously discolored, crumbly, or smelly. Never use a medication that has changed color, consistency or odor regardless of the expiration date, and throw away any medication on which the label is unreadable. Dispose of medications that have not been stored according to recommendations, like something that should have been in the refrigerator but was not. Also, it's important to take care when disposing of unused medication. Keep out of reach of children, animals and others that may be hurt by leftover drugs.

Are there special considerations for taking medications when traveling?

Yes. If you are driving, do not store medications in your glove compartment. The temperature and rain could cause damage.

When flying, the following tips on medication storage will help:

- Keep your medications in your carry on or purse.
- Bring them in their original labeled containers so airport

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security will know they are prescribed for you.

- Diabetics are allowed to carry insulin, lancets, and syringes on to the plane, but you may want to ask your healthcare provider to describe your medical regimen and any devices you use in a letter.
- Carry a copy of your prescriptions with you, along with your pharmacist's name and number in case you need to get more medication while on your trip.
- Try to carry enough medication for the entire trip, and if possible bring a little extra in case your return is delayed.
- Keep a current medication list in your purse or wallet along with how you take the meds. You'll want to include any allergies you have and your healthcare providers' phone number and address.
- Always take your health insurance card with you.
- If you are changing time zones ask your healthcare provider how to adjust your medication schedule.

More information on travel tips and safe storage of medicines is available through the American Society of Health Systems Pharmacists at: www.safemedication.com

Your pharmacist can be a very useful resource for information on storing medications. Using common sense and caution when storing and traveling with medications will help keep you and your loved ones safe. ❖

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