

# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR MEDICINES AT HOME

Today, the abuse of prescription medicines is more widespread than the abuse of traditional street drugs, excluding marijuana. In fact, the number of people who abuse prescription medicines is approximately three times the number of people who abuse cocaine.\* Thus, we all need to be vigilant in protecting our own medicines from abuse.



The most commonly abused medicines are opioid pain relievers, sedatives, and stimulants. Abusers obtain these drugs by fraud and by theft. Fraud includes forging prescriptions and faking illnesses in order to trick doctors into writing prescriptions. Thieves not only burglarize pharmacies, they also steal from individual patients, such as yourself.

Sometimes this person is a family member or caregiver – someone you would never suspect. Here are steps you can take to:

## **Protect Your Medicines**

- Lock medicines and medical supplies, such as syringes, in a locking cabinet and secure the key.
- Always store medicines in a cool, dry place protected from light.
- Do not store prescription drugs in the bathroom medicine cabinet. A bathroom is hot and humid; bathroom medicine cabinets rarely lock.
- Do not store medicines in the glove compartment of your car or in kitchen cabinets. Here, too, heat and moisture degrade medicines and may make them unsafe.
- Keep medicines out of direct sunlight and away from a radiator or heating duct.
- Make sure all bottles are tightly closed.
- Do not store medicines inside purses, coat pockets, nightstands, or other locations easily accessed by others.
- Store all medicines in their original containers with the original labels intact.
- Do not store medicines in the refrigerator or freezer unless directed by your pharmacist.

## **Protect Yourself**

- Never take medicine in the dark. Always turn the light on and wear your glasses if required for reading.
- Read the label each time to check the dosage before opening the bottle.
- Examine the medicine itself before taking it. Check for capsules or tablets that differ from the others in the bottle.

- If the appearance or the odor of the medicine has changed, check with your pharmacist before taking it.
- Follow the directions carefully. Special instructions, such as “Do not take with grapefruit” or “Take two hours before or after meals,” are given because they affect how the medicine works or how it affects your body.
- Never use medicines after they have expired. Expiration dates are listed with EXP and a date. If only a month and year are listed, the medicine can be used until the last day of that month; that is, “EXP 1/2009” means the medicine can be taken until the last day of January 2009.
- Inspect your medicine storage cabinet at least once a year. Ask yourself these questions:

*Do I need the medicine?*

*Is it in its original container with the label firmly attached?*

*Is there an expiration date on the label?*

*Are my doctors and my pharmacist aware of all medicines I am taking?*

- Dispose of unidentified and out-of-date medications as instructed by your pharmacist.

## **Protect Your Loved Ones**

Each year accidental poisonings from medicines and household chemicals kill about 30 children and prompt more than 1 million calls to the nation’s Poison Control Centers. The number to reach your Poison Control Center is **1-800-222-1222**.

- Avoid taking medicines in front of children. Children like to imitate grown-ups.
- Use child-resistant packaging on your medicines whenever possible — it saves lives.
- Replace child-resistant caps securely after each use.
- Never call medicine “candy,” call it “medicine.”
- Do not discard any medicines, including patches, in the wastebasket where children can find them.

*(continued)*

- If you are giving medicine to a loved one, check the label every time you give it.
- Keep track of doses to ensure that you are correctly following the directions on the bottle label.

**If you ever suspect anyone has stolen your prescription medicine, report it to your local police department. You may save the thief from tragedy...you may even save a life.**

## More Information

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**\*Source:** Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, *2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, p. 230.

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