



Talk About Your Medicines Month

“Safe Use, Storage and Disposal of Your Medicines” – Article for your Newsletter, Blog, etc.

October marks the [BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds 34th Talk About Your Medicines Month \(TAYMM\)](#), an annual opportunity to focus attention on the value that enhanced provider-patient communication about medicines can play in promoting safe and appropriate medicine use and improved health outcomes. Of course, communication is a two-way street. Consumers benefit from being proactive in asking questions and seeking information about their medicines; and healthcare providers in turn must be able to share medical information in a meaningful way that their patients are able to understand and act on.

The opioid epidemic persists, whether you live in a large city, affluent suburb or rural community. On average, 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose (ref. [CDC](#)). The dedicated [Talk About Your Medicines](#) website features tips, fact sheets and a library of [resources](#) for patients, healthcare providers and caregivers, focused on this year's [TAYMM theme: Preventing Opioid Misuse and Abuse Across the Ages](#). Tips include how and why you should keep all of your medicines up and away and out of reach of your toddlers; the important conversations you should have with your tween, teen and college student about responsible medicine use; and how to recognize and resolve problems that may occur when an older adult you are caring for is prescribed an opioid medication. Help protect your family and learn about the risks, responsibilities, safe use, storage and disposal of opioids. Responsible use includes learning about other treatment options and non-opioid alternatives that may be a better choice for either you or a loved one who are experiencing pain from an injury, medical condition, or surgery. The tips below will help you get started:

Use Opioids Safely: The FDA Recommends these 3 Key Steps when you or your loved one are prescribed an opioid:

- 1. Keep your doctor informed.** Inform your healthcare professional about any past history of substance abuse. All patients treated with opioids for pain require careful monitoring by their healthcare professional for signs of abuse and addiction, and to determine when these analgesics are no longer needed.
- 2. Follow directions carefully.** Opioids are associated with significant side effects, including drowsiness, constipation, and depressed breathing depending on the amount taken. Taking too much could cause severe respiratory depression or death. Do not crush or break pills. This can alter the rate at which the medication is absorbed and lead to overdose and death.
- 3. Reduce the risk of drug interactions.** Don't mix opioids with alcohol, antihistamines, barbiturates, or benzodiazepines. All of these substances slow breathing and their combined effects could lead to life-threatening respiratory depression.

Safe Storage and Disposal of Prescription Opioids Can Help Prevent Misuse and Abuse (ref. [AAOA](#))

- Dispose of unused opioid medications as soon as possible. Safe disposal is an important part of addressing the opioid abuse epidemic.
- Do not share your medication, even if you know someone who is experiencing symptoms similar to yours or has been prescribed the same product in the past. Monitor the medicine you take and how much you

have left so you will know if there is any medicine missing. Store all opioids in their original packaging, so you retain the prescription information, directions for use and expiration date.

- Be sure to keep these medicines out of reach of young children, who can accidentally consume or abuse the prescription opioids.
- When you are done using your prescription opioids, scratch out personal information on the label to protect your privacy follow disposal directions you received with your medicines. If you did not receive directions, ask your healthcare professional or pharmacist about disposal or consult the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines. Many opioids are on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s [list of medicines recommended for disposal by flushing](#), meaning you can flush the unused prescription down the toilet. Existing data suggest these medicines pose low environmental risk if flushed.
- Take advantage of programs that accept unused medications for proper disposal. Find the disposal location in your area by visiting www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org/disposal. You also can ask your healthcare professional's office or pharmacist if they provide medication disposal bags (these bags neutralize medicines to avoid damage to the environment).
- Alternately, you can combine your medication with dirt, kitty litter or used coffee grounds and discard in the trash.
- Give your medicines a check-up. Go through all of your medicines every six months and dispose of those that are past their expiration date or are left over from a previous illness or condition.