

Safe Use, Storage, and Disposal of Prescription Opioid Medications

Strategies for safely using, storing and disposing of opioids

This resource is part of the AAOS-ASA Pain Alleviation Toolkit, strategies for safe and effective alleviation of pain and optimal opioid stewardship. AAOS and ASA partnered to develop the toolkit, recognizing that empathic communication between the surgical team, patients, and families helps prepare patients for the pain of recovery from injury or surgery.

Prescription drug abuse is a serious public health issue.
Opioids reduce pain for a short time but can be dangerous if used improperly.

Safe Use

Improper use of pain medicine is a leading cause of accidental death.

- Combining opioids with alcohol or other drugs increases the risk of death.
- Take medications only as prescribed.
 - Never take more than instructed.
 - Never take somebody else's medicine.
 - Never give or sell your medicine to someone else.
- Combining opioids with medicines used to calm anxiety can result in overdose.
- Using opioids for something other than pain (anxiety, sleep, fear of pain, to feel good) can create a harmful dependence/addiction.

Safe Storage

Unused medicines in your home are at risk for inappropriate use.

- Pain relievers are a leading cause of serious poisoning of children and pets when they are left where others can get them.
- Hide or lock up opioid medications to avoid access by family, friends, or houseguests.
- Keep prescription medications in their original packaging so it is clear for whom the medications were prescribed and to save the directions for appropriate use.

Safe Disposal

Place unused opioids in a disposal unit in a pharmacy or police station.

- Find a disposal site near you at: <https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch>

If no medicine take-back program is available in your area, you can flush them down the toilet or follow these simple steps to dispose of most medicines in the household trash:

- Mix medicines (do NOT crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds;
 - Place the mixture in a container such as a sealed plastic bag; and
 - Throw the container in your household trash
 - Before throwing out your empty pill bottle or other empty medicine packaging, remember to scratch out all information on the label to make it unreadable.
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