

## How to dispose of empty medication bottles? <sup>[1]</sup>

Hi Alice!

How do I properly dispose of my empty prescription medication bottles? Can I just throw them in the trash? That seems unsafe since they have my name, but I also throw out junk mail with my name.....

Thanks!

A safe pill-popper

### **Answer**

Dear safe pill-popper,

Great question, as many people toss out a prescription bottle without thinking twice. Sure, you could throw away your empty medication bottles, but it's highly recommended that you remove any personal information from the bottles before doing so. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) <sup>[2]</sup> suggests scratching out any personal information, including your name, date of birth, your health care provider's name, and the medication type. In the wrong hands, access to your personal health information (PHI) could enable someone to fill your prescription and even to steal your identity. Prescription bottles and lids are usually made of plastics #1 through #7, which means they're typically recyclable.

Here's some additional information about prescription medication bottle disposal you might want to consider:

- You may want to remove the label entirely. First, try to peel it off, and if that doesn't work, you may try soaking the bottle. Fill your sink with hot water and put your empty medication bottle(s) in to soak. This may loosen the adhesive on the label, making it easier to remove. Once you take the bottles out of the water, scrape off the label with something sharp. If there's still some residue on the bottle, try using some essential oil to help with the glue.
- Occasionally, hospitals and recycling centers will hold collection events as a way to safely dispose of medication bottles and unused medications. They typically black out or remove your information from the bottles and dispose of them. You could contact your local hospital

or recycling center to find out about these events.

- Some pharmacies may also accept old medication bottles and dispose of them when you refill prescriptions. You might also find that some pharmacies even have disposal boxes on-site. You could ask your pharmacist what the protocol is when you go to fill your next prescription.
- There are some medications that come in inhalers that make it unsafe to throw out in the garbage. It's recommended that you check the disposal instructions that may come with the medication. If nothing is listed, you could check with your pharmacist or the local trash and recycling facility.

Have any medication left over that you don't need to take? It may also be helpful to know that there are some specific procedures for disposing of medications you no longer need:

- Read and follow any disposal instructions that come with the medication.
- Unless the instructions say to do so, don't flush unused medications or pour them down a sink or drain.
- Unused medications may sometimes also be returned to authorized sites including hospitals, pharmacies, and law enforcement locations. Check for [medicine take-back programs](#) [3] at these or other locations.
- If there aren't any disposal instructions, it's recommended that you dispose of the medications in a sealable bag mixed with kitty litter, sawdust, coffee grounds, or any material that mixes with the medication and makes it less appealing to children and pets who may get into the trash. Seal the bag and toss it.

*List adapted from the FDA.*

You're wise to consider what to do when you're done taking your medication. Here's to hoping this information is the right treatment for your prescription bottle inquiry!

Alice!

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