



# Practice safety at home with opioid painkillers

## Safe storage

Opioid medications need to be stored securely, preferably locked up just the way you would if you keep a firearm in your home.

- Choose a location in your house that is up and away and out of sight of children and visitors. Install a lock or use a locking medicine cabinet.
- Return medication to your secure location after every use. Avoid leaving medication or pill containers on countertops, tables or nightstands in open view where they can be easily accessed by others.
- Do not keep loose pills in easily opened plastic bags or containers in your purse, luggage or office drawer. Locking travel cases are available to carry prescription medicines.

## Safe disposal

Once an individual is finished taking an opioid painkiller, they should promptly dispose of them and not keep these medications for "later."

- Take-back programs and events allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal.
- Many pharmacies offer mail-back programs where you can pick up a drug disposal envelope at their nearest store. Most pharmacies charge a small fee for a postage paid envelope.
- Avoid flushing prescriptions down the toilet or pour in a drain because they can pollute water supplies. In some states, it is illegal to flush any medications.
- If a take-back or pharmacy mail-back program is not available in your community, you can go online to learn how to safely dispose of unused medications.

Visit [nsc.org/disposalresources](http://nsc.org/disposalresources) to find a take back program or learn how to safely dispose of unwanted medicine.

## Don't mix

Opioid medications are dangerous because the difference between the amount needed to feel their effects and the amount needed to kill a person is small and unpredictable.

Respiratory depression is the chief hazard associated with opioid painkillers. Using them with alcohol, sleeping pills and anti-anxiety medications increase the respiratory depression caused by opioids. So if someone is drinking or taking tranquilizers and takes the usual doses of opioids, he or she may pass out, stop breathing and die.

- Never mix opioid medications with alcohol, sleep aids, anti-anxiety drugs or other pain relievers.
- Mixing extended-release and long acting opioids can be dangerous. Do not take extended-release opioids as-needed for pain or more frequently than the doctor prescribed.
- Individuals should talk to their prescriber and/or pharmacist to ensure they are not at risk for any other drug interactions.

## Don't share

Do NOT share your opioid painkillers. Don't give a pill to a friend, family member or co-worker, even if the person is in pain. Sharing pain medication is illegal and dangerous.

- Opioid medications should not be given to, sold to, or 'borrowed' by friends or relatives.
- Keeping your medication in locked storage will prevent anyone else from taking your medications. Count and keep an inventory of your opioid pills so you will know if any go missing.
- The majority of people who abuse these drugs obtain them from friends or relatives.

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