



TO YOUR HEALTH

**Carleton-Willard Village, 100 Old Billerica Rd.,
Bedford, MA 01730**

Medication Safety
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You wake up with a headache and reach for a pain reliever in your medicine cabinet, only to find that it expired last year. Do you take it or don't you? Has the medicine "gone bad" or maybe it's just not as potent? If it is too old to take, what's the best way to dispose of it? What about all those prescriptions, are they all necessary or could you cut back on some? Many of us face these questions in some way or another.

Since 1979 drug manufacturers have been required to stamp an expiration date on their products. The expiration date is the final day that the manufacturer guarantees the full potency and safety of a medication. For legal and liability reasons, manufacturers will not make recommendations about the stability of drugs past the original expiration date. Many factors, including heat, humidity, light, presence of preservatives and storage conditions influence the stability of a drug. This makes it difficult to assess which products could have an extended shelf-life. Once a package is opened, the shelf life may decline.

Most of what is known about drug expiration dates comes from a study the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) conducted for the Department of Defense called Shelf Life Extension Program (SLEP). This study found that many military stockpile medications retained 90 percent of their potency beyond expiration when kept in their original stock bottle under optimal conditions, in some cases over a decade longer.

Proper storage of medications may help to extend their potency. The bathroom and medicine cabinet are not ideal places to store medications due to heat and humidity. Similarly, medications should not be left in a hot car. Medications remain most stable in dry, cool spaces away from light. Prescription bottle caps should be kept tightly closed and out of reach of children and pets.

So what is the bottom line? Should you use expired medications or not? If a medication is needed, and you are not able to replace the expired medication, there is no evidence that it is unsafe to take the medication in most cases. However, if a medication is essential for a chronic and potentially life-threatening disease, for example, a heart condition, seizure, or life-threatening allergy, it is probably wise to get a new prescription once expired. If an expired medication is for a minor health problem, for example, for a headache, hay fever, or mild pain, it may be safe to take it, although drug potency might not be 100 percent. If an expired medication is taken, and you notice



the drug has limited or no therapeutic effect, the medication should be replaced. If the medication is a biologic product, insulin, EpiPen, refrigerated liquid, eye drop, injectable, or looks like it is degraded or cloudy, it should be discarded and replaced. If you're still wondering about how to handle an expired medication, it is wise to speak with your pharmacist or health care provider, who can offer additional information and advice.

Expired medications that you no longer want should be disposed of safely. They can be brought to a collection unit at the Bedford police station 24 hours a day. The Bedford Police also offer a convenient pickup at Carleton-Willard Village Clinic every 3 months. The next date for drug pick up at the Village is Friday, February 10. Expired medications that are collected are disposed of by means of incineration.

Too many pills?

Polypharmacy is defined as an increase in the number of medications or the use of more medications than are medically necessary. Multidrug therapy is essential to effectively manage chronic diseases in many older adults but it can also increase the risk of negative health outcomes. Approximately thirty percent of hospital admissions in older adults can be linked to polypharmacy.

Here are some simple tips for avoiding polypharmacy:

- Always read labels
- Use only one pharmacy to fill prescriptions
- Learn your medications by name and know what they are for
- Update your Vial of Life at home with any medication changes, including vitamins and supplements. Also, notify the Clinic with any changes
- Carry your Vial of Life everywhere. Bring it to every doctor visit, along with the pill bottles. Are there any pills you might be able to discontinue?
- If you have more than one doctor, make sure each one knows what the other is prescribing
- Ask your primary caregiver or pharmacist to run your medication list through a drug interactions database to identify possible problems
- Avoid combination products such as cold formulas. Ask your pharmacist to help you find a product just for the symptoms you're experiencing – not for every possible symptom
- Never take a new drug without asking your pharmacist about its side effects and interactions with other drugs
- Get familiar with your medications. Learn about them from your health care provider or pharmacist

ACUPUNCTURE & ACUPRESSURE



Chinese medicine makes “Qi” flow smoothly through our bodies. When Qi flows we remove blockages, have no pain, feel grounded and are in harmony with ourselves. “Qi” is the Chinese connotation of our essential energy that contains an active physical part that transforms into an ethereal aspect of breath and spirit. In this way “Qi” is our essence of body-mind-spirit. When Qi is in balance we are in comfort with ourselves.