



What should you do with your unused drugs?

DON'T FLUSH THEM AWAY!

Your toilet bowl maybe the time-honored venue for dumping expired or unused drugs, but your local waterways could suffer for it.

The US Geologic Survey has been studying the nation's waterways for years, and an exhaustive study in 2002 detected trace levels of chemicals commonly found in prescription drugs in 80 percent of the streams tested across the country. Now, under pressure from researchers who suspect hormones and antidepressants may be responsible for harming fish, the US Environmental Protection Agency is on the march to gauge the health and environmental impact of pharmaceuticals in water.

"In the last year," says EPA press officer Suzanne Ackerman, "the agency has made some 'ground-breaking' advances and is testing methods that may be effective in removing pharmaceuticals from the water." "The going is slow," she concedes, "but it's happening."

Meanwhile, what should you do with your unused drugs? There are no government guidelines, so pharmaceutical experts recommend:

1. Find out if your local pharmacies take back medications. some have occasional days designated for such drop-offs.
2. Check to see whether your area has a community household hazardous waste collection program.

If you must turn to your garbage can, take these precautions:

- Keep the medication in its original container. Scratch out your name for security purposes.
- Add a small amount of water to pills or an absorbent material like flour to liquid medications, to discourage their use.
- Put the containers in a paper bag or a yogurt container to conceal them. Toss them into your trash as close to pick-up time as possible.