Is it Safe to Take Expired Medicine?

What does an expiration date mean?

The expiration date is the last date that a medicine manufacturer can guarantee that a medicine is safe, effective, and of full strength.



Key Facts

- Expiration dates help protect your health.
- Most medicines do not suddenly become harmful the day after they expire.
- However, expired medicines may become weaker and may not work as well as expected.
- It is impossible to know how much strength a medicine has lost after it expires.

Why does this matter?

If a medicine loses strength, it may not treat your illness properly. This can delay recovery and, in some cases, lead to serious health problems.

Quick Tips

- Always check the expiration date before using a medicine.
- Store medicines in a cool, dry place.
- Keep medicines in their original containers.
- Dispose of expired medicines promptly.

The safest choice is to use medicines before they expire.

Risks of Taking Expired Medicines

Can you take expired medicine?

In general, it is better to avoid expired medicines. Taking some expired ibuprofen for a headache is probably OK. But using expired insulin for diabetes or nitroglycerin for angina is not.



Liquid medicines such as eye drops, ear drops, and liquid antibiotics can spoil more quickly and may become contaminated with germs. These should not be used after expiration.

Medicines for serious conditions deserve extra caution. Expired insulin for diabetes or nitroglycerin for heart disease may not work properly and could lead to a medical emergency.

The risk depends on:

- The type of medicine
- How long it has been expired
- How it was stored
- Whether it is used for a serious medical condition

Possible Risks

⚠️ **Reduced effectiveness**

- The medicine may no longer work properly.
- Symptoms may not improve.

⚠️ **Bacterial contamination**

- Some liquid medicines can grow germs after expiration.
- Eye drops, ear drops, and liquid antibiotics are especially vulnerable.

⚠️ **Treatment failure**

- Weak antibiotics may not completely treat infections and could contribute to antibiotic resistance.

Medicines Requiring Extra Caution

❌ Expired insulin for diabetes
❌ Expired nitroglycerin for chest pain
❌ Expired liquid antibiotics
❌ Expired eye or ear drops
These medicines may fail when they are needed most.

Special Emergency Situations

In a life-threatening allergic reaction, using an expired EpiPen may be better than having no treatment available while waiting for emergency medical help.

The longer a medicine has been expired, the greater the chance it may not work properly.

Safe Storage and Disposal of Medicines

Storage Matters

Heat, sunlight, and moisture can damage medicines even before they expire.

✅ **Store medicines in a cool, dry cupboard.**

❌ **Avoid storing medicines in places where humidity is high.**



It is suggested to avoid the Expired Medicine Problem:

✅ **Buy only what you need**

- Avoid purchasing large quantities of medicines.
- Many medicines expire before they are fully used.

✅ **Keep prescriptions current**

- Do not accumulate extra refills.
- Your medication or dose may change over time.

✅ **Check medicines every year**

- Review your medicine cabinet annually.
- Remove expired medicines.
- Replace important medicines with fresh supplies.

How to Dispose of Expired Medicines

<u>Best Option: Medicine Take-Back Programs</u>

✅ **Return expired or unused medicines to:**

- Pharmacies
- Community medicine take-back programs
- Authorized collection sites

If No Take-Back Program Is Available

✅ **Place the mixture in a sealed bag before throwing it away.**

✅ **Keep it away from children and pets.**

Flushing Medicines

⚠ **Do not routinely flush medicines.**

Only flush medicines specifically listed on the FDA Flush List because they can be especially dangerous if accidentally taken by others.

Remember

✅ **Check expiration dates regularly.**

✅ **Store medicines properly.**

✅ **Dispose of expired medicines safely.**

✅ **When in doubt, throw it out and get a fresh supply.**