



Nutrition News - September 2022

Safe Medication Disposal For Homebound Older Adults

When older adults need to take multiple medications for various conditions, it's easy for medicine cabinets to become cluttered with unused and expired prescriptions and other medications. It can become a harmful situation in many ways, mainly when the medications fall into the wrong hands or are disposed of improperly. Medication mix-ups and accidental ingestions also become more likely. Emergency departments nationwide report approximately 1.3 million visits a year, along with 350,000 hospital visits for further treatment.

While Dutchess County offers many pharmaceutical collection sites, collects hundreds of pounds of medications during OFA's Summer Picnic program, and takes part in the national drug takeback days that happen in April and October, a homebound older adult may find it impossible to take advantage of these opportunities. They can easily be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of medication, and the potential for dangerous situations grows.

There needs to be a simple way for homebound older adults to dispose of medications.

That's why Dutchess County OFA is joining the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) and Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) in distributing environmentally-sound Deterra drug deactivation and disposal pouches to homebound older adults in September. These pouches are designed to destroy unwanted and expired medications safely and permanently. The medications are rendered inert, and the pouches can be disposed of in regular household trash.

How Deterra Pouches Work

Step 1: Tear open a pouch and pour in the unused medication

Step 2: Fill halfway with water

Step 3: Seal, shake well, and toss in the trash

And that's it. Each Deterra pouch has a recommended capacity printed on it. Used as directed, the Deterra system will deactivate organic medications, including opioids. It cannot deactivate inorganic medications like antacids, lithium and iron supplements. Some medications list specific disposal instructions. Consult your pharmacist to find out the specifics.

Don't Just Flush Old Medications

Most medications should not be flushed. Water treatment facilities have difficulty filtering out pharmaceuticals. As a result, drugs can wind up in our drinking water. A 2018 study in the journal *Water Research* found 16 different pharmaceutical compounds in the Hudson River, with some of the highest concentrations not near New York City as you might expect, but upriver as far north as Kingston, Albany and Troy.

Dutchess County Office for the Aging

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The Dutchess County Office for the Aging is funded under Title III of the U.S. Older Americans Act, the New York State Office for the Aging, and the county of Dutchess.

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