



Twenty Two Ways to Avoid Unintentional Poisoning

Unintentional poisoning can happen to anyone, at any time, in any situation. Last year, approximately 10,500 people died from exposure to drugs, medicines, mushrooms and shellfish, as well as commonly recognized potential poisons.

As consumers, we buy over a quarter of a million household products--products used in and around the home for medication, cleaning, cosmetic purposes, exterminating insects and killing weeds. These items are valuable in the home and for yard maintenance, but misuse, especially when products are used in inappropriate applications or quantities, can cause illness, and even death.

You can keep yourself and family members safer by being aware of potential hazards and observing these 22 ways to "poison-proof" your home.

1. Regularly clean out the medicine cabinet. Discard medicines that have expired or have changed color, become cloudy, settled, or hardened. Liquid medicines, pills and capsules should be flushed down the toilet. Rinse and discard containers. Remember that children often rummage through garbage containers and wastebaskets.
2. Have a "child-resistant" section in your medicine cabinet that locks. Even if your cabinet is "high-up," youngsters are inquisitive and avid climbers. They can easily reach a cabinet by climbing from the toilet (or other convenient object) to the sink and thus reach into the cabinet.
3. Make sure medication lids are tightly closed. A child-resistant cap is not effective if not properly fastened after each use. Remember that "child-resistant" does not mean "child-proof."
4. Never take medication in front of a child or refer to pills as candy. Kids often mimic adults. Also, something that tastes awful to an adult may not faze a small child. They swallow almost everything.
5. Get clear directions on how medication should be taken. Find out from your physician or pharmacist if medication should be taken with food, before or after meals, swallowed, chewed, if you should avoid alcohol, etc., as well as any side effects it can produce. Go to one pharmacy for all your prescriptions.
6. Always read, or re-read, the label on any medication before taking it. Labels are communicators of information. They tell you not only what the product is and who made it, but also how much you're buying, how to use it and precautions you should take while using it.
7. Don't share or borrow another person's medicine, even if you have the same condition or symptoms. We all react differently to various medications.
8. Keep a daily record. Know what and how much medication you are taking including over-the-counter drugs. If you are seeing two or more doctors, be sure each knows what other medicines have been prescribed. Take this list with you each time you visit any doctor or pharmacist.
9. Do not keep different pills in the same container. This may result in taking the wrong capsule at the wrong time. If you must take several kinds of pills daily, keep them separated.
10. Use the plastic dosing cap that comes with liquid medicine. Do not use tableware spoons to measure liquid. These come in many sizes and cannot be considered an accurate measure for medications. Always follow label directions for dosage and time intervals between doses.



11. Buy only the amount you anticipate you will need. Buying the jumbo size may not always save you money. With most drugs, the contents of giant-sized containers tend to spoil faster.

12. Ironically, the bathroom medicine cabinet is not the best place to store medicines. Because of the presence of moisture, the composition of some medicines could change over time. This could affect their potency and in some cases even make them harmful. It is better to keep medicines in a cool, dry place, such as a high cupboard, preferably locked.

13. Never take any medication in the dark. Have a lamp within reach of every bed, and put on your glasses, if needed, to read labels. Also, keep only enough medication for the night at the bedside.

14. Children should not have access to dressing tables and personal-care items. Hair spray, hair coloring and permanent wave solutions, cologne, perfumes, nail polish remover, artificial fingernail glue and remover and astringents should be kept where children can't get to them.

15. Check under the sink and on low cabinet shelves. Look for stored products that could be hazardous to young children. These could include items such as bleaching agents, rust removers, drain openers, ammonia, oven cleaners, detergents, furniture polish, floor wax, metal polish, wax remover or wall/floor/toilet-bowl cleaners. If products cannot be moved, install locks or safety latches on the cupboard doors to keep inquisitive youngsters out.

16. Keep all products in their original containers with their labels in place. Children, and even adults, might mistake the contents for the original beverage.

17. Keep potentially hazardous cleaning compounds capped until you dispense the amount you need, and then close them again immediately. Do not leave the unattended container uncapped even for "just a minute" if toddlers are present.

18. Be wary of visitors if you have toddlers. People who visit may carry medications in coat pockets, jackets and purses. Hang these items where children cannot get access to them. Young children should be carefully supervised. This is also important when visiting households where only adults live.

19. Many poisonings to youngsters happen when the household routine has been interrupted, such as when a parent is ill; when a family is moving; when a family is on a trip, when there is a guest in the home; when there is family tension; or when seasonal products are in use. You need to be particularly careful during these times.

20. Handle pesticides with respect. They vary in degree of toxicity. Don't use them near people or pets or on windy days. Do not eat, drink or smoke before washing up. Follow instructions for application, and heed all directions, cautions and warnings.

21. Store pesticides in a cabinet or room that is locked. When disposing of containers, wrap them in several layers of newspaper and place them in a trash can with a tight-fitting lid.

22. The garage, basement and back porch are not catchalls for storing potentially dangerous chemical mixtures. These include insecticides, herbicides, paints, turpentine, kerosene, gasoline, antifreeze, windshield washer solutions, pool chemicals, charcoal lighter fluid, bleaches, ammonia and rust remover.



If you suspect someone in your household has come in contact with a poison, call your poison control center immediately. These centers maintain information on recommended treatment for the ingestion of household products and medicines. Bring with you to the phone the suspected poison container. The phone number of the poison control center can be found on the inside cover of the yellow or white pages of the telephone directory. Keep the number on or near your phone. If unable to contact the PCC, call your local emergency number.

Protecting your family from unintentional poisonings is no small task. But if you take these twenty precautions, use all medicines and household products carefully, store them wisely and stay cautious--you can have a safer and healthier home and family.

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