

Environmental Wellness

Environmental wellness means feeling comfortable in your own home and area but knowing that your own daily habits can affect the earth. It is living a life that doesn't harm the land or air. It is being willing to learn new ways to keep your home or work area safe so you and your family can be protected from harm.

A Healthy Environment

Our home environment can affect our health and changes how we feel. If your home is not safe then physical and mental ailments can occur. There are many steps that you and your family can take to make your home safer. Knowledge is power and you can control your own home environment. You can have peace of mind by getting everything checked out or by following through with simple suggestions.

Lead continues to be a threat in older homes. Even low doses can affect a child's development and cause problems learning. Make sure your walls are painted with newer paints which are lead-free. Be careful of the glazed pottery cups and dishes you can use. Some still have a high lead coating.

Carbon Monoxide from cars, space heaters and other home heating sources can give off carbon monoxide, a deadly gas. A smoke alarm will not tell you if carbon monoxide is building up in your air. Buy a carbon monoxide alarm and check it frequently to make sure it is working correctly.

Molds and Mildew build up is easy to form especially if your home is near water or has limited sunlight. Your body can react to mold and cause allergies and sinus issues. There are special sprays on the market to kill mold buildup and these areas may need checked monthly to make sure mold does not return.

Dust builds up easily in our homes but did you know dust is a home for mites (bugs NOT seen by the naked eye) which cause allergies? Dusting often and getting rid of old rugs and curtains may help to keep the dust count down.

Animals and pollen from trees and cockroaches can also cause allergies. Keeping up with pet hair by vacuuming often will help. Also try to get an air conditioner to cut down from outside pollen coming in your window and an exterminator can eliminate cockroaches.

Washing your hands can make a big difference in spreading germs. Start your kids out with a good habit from a young age. After sneezing, before preparing food, after changing diapers, or taking garbage out, always wash your hands.

Watch Out for the Sun Everyone loves to play outside but on sunny days your skin can be in danger. Too much sun can damage your skin, especially fair skin individuals. The sun's harmful rays can lead to skin cancer later in life. Using a sunscreen is very important to prevent permanent spots, freckles and wrinkles. Don't forget, a child's skin should be protected every time they go out to play.

There are also other ways to keep your environment safe and clean from harmful materials and illnesses. For a complete guide see the website the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at:

http://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/materials/a_family_guide_20_easy_steps_to_personal_environmental_health_now.pdf

For other environmental information view the main site of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at:

<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>

This tip sheet was adapted from the Family Guide-20 Easy Steps to Personal Environmental Health Now from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

Medication Safety-How to Dispose Of Unused Medications

Many times patients do not finish their entire prescription or the doctor changes their medication and disposing of these medications was never an issue until a few years ago. Most people just flush their medications down the toilet. Growing concerns of how the drugs could be affecting our water supply was voiced so the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) had an assessment completed on the water in our rivers and lakes and some community drinking water supplies and the findings were surprising. There were traces of drugs in the water but scientists did not feel it would affect human health. Still, the FDA decided that they should not take the risk and decided that a new guide on the disposal of prescription medication should be completed. The following tips were offered.

- Follow any instructions on the drug label or patient information guide that came with the medication. Do not flush the drug down the toilet unless this information specifically instructs you to do so.
- Look for community drug take-back programs in your area that allows the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Call your city or county household trash and recycling service (blue pages) to see if a take-back program is available in your community. The FDA is working with local law enforcement agencies to sponsor programs such as this.

- If no instructions are given on the drug label and no take-back program is in your area, throw the drugs in the household trash, but first you need to destroy the medications so people who go throw trash will not see it as medications.
 - Take them out of the pill bottle and mix them with cat litter or coffee grounds. Medications will be less appealing to children and pets. Then throw in your garbage bag.
 - You could also put them in a sealable bag or empty plastic container to stop the medication from leaking or breaking. Add water, soap, vinegar or other liquids. Seal and throw away.
- Before throwing out a medication container, scratch out any of your information on the label. This will protect your privacy.
- Do not give your medications to friends. Doctors order drugs based on a person's specific symptoms and medical history. A drug that works for you could be very dangerous for someone else.
- When in doubt about how to get rid of medications the right way, you can always talk to your pharmacist.

Don't forget that the way you throw away prescription medications also works for over-the counter drugs such as cold medicines and pain relievers.

For additional information go to the FDA website at:

<http://www.fda.gov/default.htm>

For a view of the guidelines go to:

<http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm101653.htm>

This Tip sheet was adapted from the Federal Drug Administration Consumer updates "How to Dispose of Unused Medicines"