

# Shelf Help

An organized medicine cabinet promises safe supplies, effective relief and easy-to-find solutions. BY RACHEL BUCCI

## ●●● HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU CLEAN OUT YOUR MEDICINE CABINET?

Shoot for twice a year, says Donna Smalin, author of *A to Z Storage Solutions*. “Spring and fall, we are already thinking about

clothes, bedding and linens that are out of season and putting them away—that could be a cue for someone,” she says. “Or when you notice things are starting to overflow, you probably need to pare down.”

## ●●● WHAT TO TOSS?

**ANYTHING THAT’S EXPIRED.** Expiration dates guarantee the effectiveness and integrity of the product, says Norm Tomaka, a pharmacist with Health First in Melbourne, Fla. Products may not be “bad” for you past the expiration date, but they may not be as effective, he says. When in doubt, toss it out.

**ANYTHING YOU DON’T USE.** If you haven’t used it in a long time or it no longer fits your lifestyle, say goodbye. Same goes

for drugs you don’t need any longer. “It’s a risk just (keeping them) in your home,” Tomaka says.

**ANYTHING THAT’S BEEN OPEN FOR MORE THAN A YEAR.** Even if the expiration date says the product is still good, toss any medication that has been unsealed for extended periods. These products, especially liquids, are considered compromised and degrade with exposure to air, Tomaka says.

## Helpful Tips

### ▶ WRITE THE OPEN DATE ON THE LABEL.

Expiration dates refer to unopened products. Anything that’s been open longer than a year should be tossed.

### ▶ BUY IN SMALLER QUANTITIES.

It may seem cheaper to buy that 600-count bottle of aspirin, but not if you have to trash it before the pills are used up. Smaller bottles are also easier to store and organize.

### ▶ BUY COATED TABLETS.

Film-coated pills cost a bit more, but are more stable than gel caps once opened.





## The Replacements

When you open your medicine cabinet only to come up empty, pharmacist Norm Tomaka recommends these natural substitutions:

▶ **ANTACIDS** Ginger is especially soothing and can alleviate indigestion and upset stomach. Chamomile tea and oil of peppermint are both natural stomach relaxants.

▶ **LAXATIVES** Nothing beats the old stand-by prune juice, Tomaka says. Another reliable and effective natural remedy: the herb senna.

▶ **PAIN RELIEVERS** (headache) For a migraine or sinus headache, rest in a cool, dark room with a light background sound. A chilled gel eye mask is also good for a sinus headache.

▶ **PAIN RELIEVERS** (arthritis or sore joints) Apply an ice pack on and off for 10 minutes. Arnica gel, derived from the perennial Alpine herb *Arnica montana*, can be as effective as the menthols and methyl-salicylates found in ointments.

▶ **COUGH SYRUP** If your sore throat is due to a virus, a light saltwater gargle will soothe throat membranes and remove excess mucus on the back of the tongue. For a dry, raspy throat, take 1 teaspoon of honey with lemon juice, followed by a cup of hot tea.

▶ **NASAL SPRAYS** Add a few drops of eucalyptus oil to a bowl of steaming water, drape a towel over your head and the bowl and inhale deeply. Echinacea supplements or a netti pot are also good options.

●●● **A THREE-STEP STORAGE PLAN**  
**DIVIDE AND CONQUER.** Don't hide it, divide it, says Los Angeles-based professional organizer John Trosko, who writes the blog [organizingla.com](http://organizingla.com). "Divide your storage into different categories: things you use every day, things you may not use every day, like a manicure kit or a weekly facial treatment, and extras of things."

**GROUP THINGS.** Gather like items into groups that make sense to you. Think first aid, morning routine, shampoos and soaps, and so on. Then use a container to corral like items. Trosko is a big fan of medicine cabinet organizers, carryalls, drawer dividers and pull-out shelves. Whatever you do, Trosko says, "avoid bottles sitting on the

vanity, or under the sink with no rhyme or reason."

**GIVE EVERYTHING A HOME.** "If you have to make a choice, make it easier to put away than it is to get out," Smallin says. "Creating a home for everything makes it easier to put things away and find things when you need them."

Everyday items should be readily accessible, with occasionally used items nearby.

Store items such as bulk shampoo wherever you have space, Smallin suggests. "It could be a box or bin that slides under the bed or in the garage or a hall cabinet. Just designate an area," she says.

Labeled baskets and shelves make it easier for other family members to get with the program.

●●● **WHAT BELONGS IN THE MEDICINE CABINET?**  
 The experts agree that the bathroom medicine cabinet isn't the best place for (surprise!) medicines and vitamins, both of which are susceptible to fluctuating temperature and humidity.

Instead, look for a dark, cool cabinet (think pantry, linen closet or walk-in closet) to store these items.

Save the medicine cabinet for beauty products and items that you use on a daily basis, Trosko says, such as toothpaste, mouthwash, face lotion and eye cream. ●