



# healthy you

## CABINET CARE

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## Medicine Cabinet Makeover

How—and where—you store medicines and toiletries keeps them safer and longer-lasting.

It's easy to keep your cabinet more organized and even safer. For starters, check expiration dates, tossing anything that's no longer good. Then divide the cabinet contents: Put frequently used toiletries in a bathroom cabinet. Lesser-used items and all medications go in a secured linen or bedroom closet. See *pages 248 and 250* for more tips offered by our own, er, cabinet of experts.

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# healthy you

## CABINET CARE

### YOUR BATHROOM CABINET

#### BEST FOR: Frequently used toiletry items

Although it's called a *medicine* cabinet, don't store medications there or in the kitchen. Temperature and humidity levels in both rooms fluctuate, sometimes causing medications to become ineffective or even harmful over time. Put the things you use most on an open shelf and place other items into trays, such as mesh drawer organizers. The products on this page are all examples of basic toiletries, but with key ingredients or new features to look for.



### OUR EXPERTS

- Nicholas G. Popovich, head of pharmacy administration at the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy
- Ann Sullivan, author of *Uncluttering Your Space*
- Bob Loftus, emergency medical technician
- Dr. Robert K. Maloney, Los Angeles ophthalmologist
- Kimberly Harms, American Dental Association adviser and Minnesota dentist

**1. Thermometer** Select one with easy-to-read numbers. For kids, use one with a reading time under 30 seconds. New ear thermometers give readings in a couple of seconds.

**2. Skin lotion** Look for mineral oil-based lotions, which help your body seal in moisture.

**3. Saline solution** It can get contaminated after a few months; big bottles could be a waste. Get small bottles—you'll save cabinet space, too.

**4. Sunscreen** For adults, get one with at least SPF 30; go higher for kids. Look for products with titanium dioxide,

which provides a physical—rather than just a chemical—barrier from the sun.

**5. Eye drops** Choose preservative-free products; they won't irritate eyes.

**6. Floss** The kind on a stick is easier to use; you'll likely use it more regularly than spool floss.

**7. Mouthwash** Antimicrobial washes help prevent gum disease and canker sores.

**8. Toothbrush** Electric brushes may scrub plaque better than manual ones. Focus on the gum line and behind the front bottom teeth, two places often missed.

PHOTOS: MARTY BALDWIN



# healthy you **CABINET CARE**

## YOUR SECURE CABINET

**USE FOR:** Prescription medications, less-frequently used and potentially dangerous items. Designate a high shelf out of the reach of young children for medications. Also put a child lock or latch on the closet door. Tape the telephone number of the national poison control centers to the wall next to medications (800/222-1222).



### 1. Bandages and gauze pads

Pitch old bandages that have yellowed at the corners. Restock from a first aid kit that contains a wide assortment of bandages.

**2. Antibacterial ointment** Keep triple antibiotic ointment for minor scrapes and bruises.

**3. Hydrocortisone** Buy creams with 1 percent hydrocortisone to deal with itches or rashes.

**4. Antacid** To treat occasional minor heartburn, look for antacids with aluminum or magnesium hydroxide and calcium carbonate. If you're popping these regularly, see your doctor.

### 5. Cough and cold remedies

For a dry, hacking cough use syrups

with dextromethorphan. Don't treat wet, productive coughs; your body is clearing itself out.

**6. Calamine lotion** Don't keep more than an 8-ounce bottle; it almost always expires before you can use it all.

**7. Pain medication** The safest pain relievers for children younger than 19 are those with acetaminophen or pediatric ibuprofen. Most have a one- to two-year expiration date. Unless you use them regularly, 100-tablet bottles should be enough.

**8. Prescription medication** Slip different color rubber bands around each family member's bottles for quick identification.

**9. Benadryl** For allergic reactions and—in conjunction with calamine lotion—for skin rashes.

## THE CARE AND KEEPING OF PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

### PROTECT FROM CHILDREN AND ELEMENTS

Medications should have childproof caps. They should be stored someplace with a lock, preferably high up.

### PRESERVE ONLY TO EXPIRATION DATE

Prescription medications aren't like that cheese you continue to nibble after the "best used by" date. Squeezing a little extra life from medications isn't worth the risk. If you take a medication beyond the expiration date, either it won't be effective or could be harmful. An example: Tetracycline, an older antibiotic still used to treat some infections, can become toxic after its expiration date.

**PROMPTLY DISPOSE** As soon as you finish taking the prescribed amount of medication, if any remains, toss it. Don't flush unused medications because that's an environmental hazard. Regulations vary by state, so ask your pharmacist what you should do with leftover medicines. The pharmacy may even have its own disposal program.