

## The recycle roundabout

*Self Care health facts column*

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In Australia, bike riding must be one of the fastest growing forms of transport. And professional cycling has also reached a new peak in popularity – perhaps because of the tremendous success in recent years of Australian cyclists in international events.

Recently, it was announced Cadel Evans will be a starter in next January's Tour Down Under, once Adelaide's, now Australia's premier cycling event.

Along with increased interest in cycling, there is also a greater awareness of the benefits of recycling. National Recycling Week was established by Planet Ark 15 years ago and now has a permanent place on the calendar of Australia-wide events during the second week of November each year.

Recycling in Australia has a long history. The first Australian paper mill to use recycled material was built in 1815. And waste paper collections from households and factories started in Melbourne in the 1920s.

During the first half of the last century, resources were generally not as readily available as they are today; so people valued them more and reused materials whenever possible.

Now, recycling has once again become an important part of our more modern society. Of course, recycling some things can be quite troublesome. And some things should never be recycled; nor should they end up on the rubbish dump. Top of the list of these non-recyclable products are medicines.

Keeping old medicines can be a health risk, and disposing of unwanted medicines inappropriately can also pose a risk to the environment.

We Australians are certainly a nation of hoarders. That may be great for some things – items of furniture perhaps, that might gain in antique status – bottles of wine that mature with age – and there are those unique collectible items such as stamps and coins that appreciate in value as time goes by.

There's no financial benefit, however, in collecting medicines. In fact, there are some significant problems associated with having old or unwanted medicines lying around the house.

It seems obvious that if your medicine cabinet is "choc-o-block" with medicines there's a chance of confusion and misadventure – even more so if those medicines are not stored correctly. They must be out of sight, out of mind and out of reach of kids and grandkids.

And while children may be at special risk by swallowing a little (or a lot) of this and that – just out of curiosity – it's also easy enough for us adults to get confused with a cupboard full of alternatives.



*Photo by John Nyberg | sxc.hu*

So what do we do to ensure our homes are safe from medication misadventure? Well, what we *don't* do is flush our unwanted medicines down the toilet or the kitchen sink; nor do we dispose of them in the household garbage.

We shouldn't assume that sewage treatment plants can effectively treat all substances contained in medicines and we don't want fish and other aquatic life suffering the side effects of medicines we no longer want.

The only safe method of disposal is to return your unwanted medicines to your local pharmacy. Medicine collection bins funded by the Commonwealth Government have been placed in every pharmacy in Australia. Once full, they are removed and the contents safely destroyed. It's all part of the RUM (Return Unwanted Medicines) campaign.

Each month the RUM program helps to prevent about 30 tonnes of medicines from potentially harming our environment or possibly harming us as well.

So, maybe now's the time to give your medicine chest a bit of a spring clean. For more information about RUM or simply to get some advice on how to sort your medicines and manage them better, call into your local Self Care Pharmacy. Phone the Pharmaceutical Society on 1300 369 772, or visit the Pharmaceutical Society website at [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) (click on "Self Care" then "Find a Self Care Pharmacy" for the nearest location).