

Purging the Medicine Cabinet

With multiple prescriptions, it's easy to “hoard” them in the medicine cabinet. Follow these instructions to ensure you have safe medications in essential amounts.

By Surayyah Morris, PharmD



IF YOU HAVE ever looked in your medicine cabinet (basket, drawer, etc.) and wondered how it turned into an overflowing stockpile of drugs, creams and devices, I have news for you: It's time to do some spring cleaning. (If your medicine cabinet is neatly organized, consider yourself someone many of us chronic illness warriors aspire to be.) Those of us with multiple long-term conditions juggle numerous medications — both prescription and over-the-counter — that somehow manage to accumulate in amounts we just can't justify. They may be a hodge-podge of different medications, a cache of duplicates or a combination of both. And, if you've “tried everything” when it comes to treating your condition(s) and haven't thrown out ineffective medication after each “fail,” I'm sure

you have amassed much more medicine than you actually need. If this sounds like you, it's time to crack down on your collection and give yourself (and your medicine cabinet) a little more breathing room.

I would love to provide an incentive for ridding your cabinet of all those extra pills (such as a dollar per pill. Oh, how we'd all be rich!); however, the only things I can offer are peace of mind and a medicine cabinet that doesn't set off an avalanche of containers when opened (which is also highly valuable). A good purge will decrease the possibility of dosing errors and help you avoid using medications that, over time, may cause you more harm than good. To do it quickly and efficiently, follow these steps carefully and in order.

How to Purge Prescriptions and Other Medications

1) *Designate*. First, gather *all* your prescriptions and over-the-counter medications and place them in front of you. You can use your bed, a large table or even the floor. Make sure everything is visible and all containers retain their original packaging and labels. Don't forget to include the refrigerated items. Next, sort everything into three piles by usage: The first pile will include prescription medications you currently take on a regularly scheduled basis such as medications to manage blood pressure or diabetes; scheduled medications such as once-a-month injections; and regimented medications such as subcutaneous immune globulin infusions. The second pile will include prescription medications you currently take as needed (PRN ["pro re nata," which means "as needed"]) such as medications used to manage pain or nausea. The third pile will include all over-the-counter medications. After designating these three piles, reserve an additional space for a fourth pile that will be your discard pile.

2) *Eliminate*. Now that everything is organized by usage, you can begin the elimination process. This section may take a little more work, especially if you tend to hoard medicine. Throwing away unnecessary products may be a little difficult, but I promise you won't miss anything you toss now. Remember: you can always purchase a new package later when you need it again. *Note: Do not throw anything in your trash can yet; we will discuss how to properly dispose of medications later.*

Starting with your first pile (prescriptions you take regularly), sort through all medications one by one and:

- Discard drugs that cannot be identified. In the future, try to keep everything in its original, labeled container so you can properly identify the medication and its formulation (pill, cream, ointment, liquid, patch).
- Discard drugs that are discolored, have an abnormal smell or look different than they originally did. Pills may be crushed, smushed or broken, and liquids may have changed color to brown, green or yellow. It will be very easy to tell if the medication has been compromised by look or smell, so trust your better judgment.
- Discard drugs that are expired. You may have heard that some medications can be used beyond the expiration date. However, medication may be ineffective or even toxic after its expiration date has passed. For the purposes of purging your

medicine cabinet, consider expired drugs to be unsafe.

- Discard drugs if it has been more than one year since you purchased or received it. This is especially important for epi-pens and glucagon medications and devices that regulate glucose. If you find that either of these is expired, immediately request a refill by contacting your doctor or pharmacy.

- Discard drugs you do not often use. If you can't recall the last time you used it, toss it.

3) *Consolidate*. An easy way to consolidate medications is to combine duplicate medicines from multiple packages into one package. This should be done only if the medications are used on a daily basis and if all of the medication from the package will be used before the "oldest" medication expires (all of which should be within the current year). Make sure you do this *only* if you feel 100 percent comfortable and if the medications are 100 percent *identical*.

Starting with your first pile (prescriptions you take regularly), sort through all medications one by one and:

- Gather two or more bottles of the same medication.
- Ensure the medication, dose and strength are all identical. Every prescription package displays a description of the medication and what it looks like. For example, the manufacturer may be Teva Pharmaceuticals, the shape may be oval, the markings may be the numbers 123 and the pill may or may not be scored (which means there is a line etched in the middle of the pill to allow for even splitting if necessary).
- Confirm the medicine you want to combine can be consumed before all expiration dates pass.
- Combine contents of the older package into the newer package.

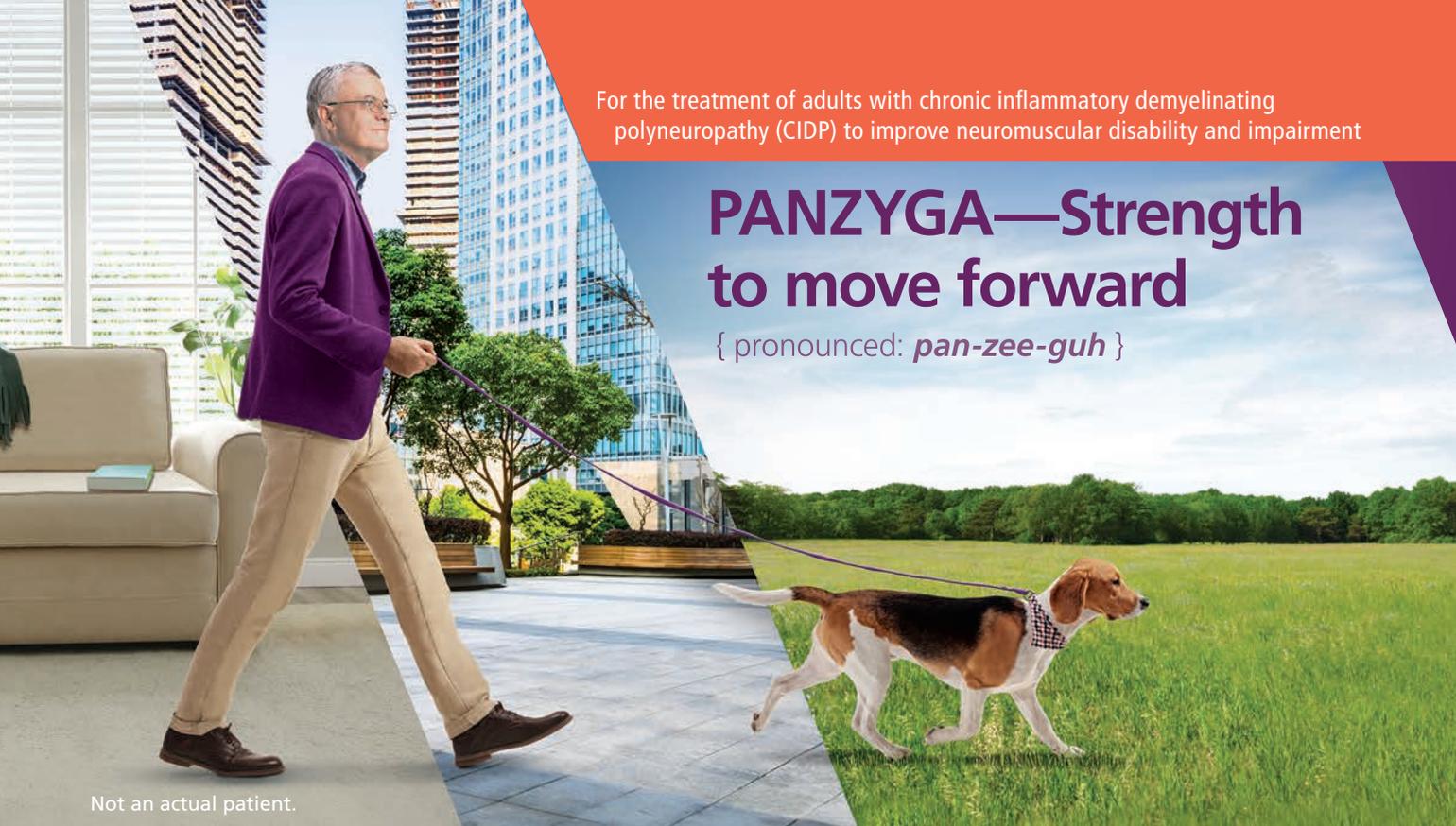
If a medicine is expired by the date on the label, place it in a trash pile.

- De-identify the empty package and recycle it.
- Repeat these steps for the second and third piles before moving on.
- 4) *Discard*. Before tossing medicine into a trash can, make sure to consider safe disposal options. You can drop off unwanted or expired medications at a medicine take back location. If a take back point is not located near you, or if you cannot easily get to

For the treatment of adults with chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP) to improve neuromuscular disability and impairment

PANZYGA—Strength to move forward

{ pronounced: *pan-zee-guh* }



Not an actual patient.

INDICATIONS AND USAGE

PANZYGA (Immune Globulin Intravenous [Human] – ifas) is indicated for the treatment of primary humoral immunodeficiency (PI) in patients 2 years of age and older, chronic immune thrombocytopenia (cITP) in adults and chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP) in adults. PANZYGA is a liquid medicine for infusion that contains immunoglobulin G (IgG), which are proteins that help fight infection. It is made from human plasma that is donated by healthy people and contains antibodies. For patients with PI, PANZYGA helps replace the missing antibodies in the body. For patients with cITP, PANZYGA helps the body produce more platelets (the blood cells that help blood clot) to control or prevent bleeding. For patients with CIDP, PANZYGA may help improve mobility and hand strength.

PANZYGA is given into a vein (intravenously) in a hospital, infusion center, doctor's office, or at home by a trained healthcare provider (HCP).

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

WARNING: THROMBOSIS, RENAL DYSFUNCTION, and ACUTE RENAL FAILURE

See full prescribing information for complete **BOXED WARNING**

- **Thrombosis may occur with immune globulin intravenous (IGIV) products, including PANZYGA. Risk factors may include: advanced age, prolonged immobilization, hypercoagulable conditions, history of venous or arterial thrombosis, use of estrogens, indwelling vascular catheters, hyperviscosity, and cardiovascular risk factors.**
- **Renal dysfunction, acute renal failure, osmotic nephropathy, and death may occur with the administration of IGIV products in predisposed patients. Renal dysfunction and acute renal failure occur more commonly in patients receiving IGIV products containing sucrose. PANZYGA does not contain sucrose.**
- **For patients at risk of thrombosis, renal dysfunction, or acute renal failure, administer PANZYGA at the minimum infusion rate practicable. Ensure adequate hydration in patients before administration. Monitor for signs and symptoms of thrombosis and assess blood viscosity in patients at risk for hyperviscosity.**

Do not use PANZYGA if you:

- Have had a severe allergic reaction to immune globulin or other blood products
- Have a condition called selective (or severe) immunoglobulin A (IgA) deficiency, with antibodies against IgA and a history of hypersensitivity

What should I know before taking PANZYGA?

- PANZYGA can make vaccines (like measles/mumps/rubella or chickenpox vaccines) work less effectively for you. Before you get any vaccines, tell your healthcare provider that you take PANZYGA
- Decreased kidney function and kidney function failure can occur
- Severe headache, drowsiness, fever, painful eye movements, or nausea and vomiting can occur
- Elevated blood pressure can occur particularly in patients who have a history of hypertension (high blood pressure)
- If you are elderly, with heart or kidney problems, discuss with your healthcare provider prior to initiating treatment with PANZYGA
- PANZYGA is made from human blood and therefore may have a risk of transmitting infectious agents, including viruses and, theoretically, the variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) and CJD agent. The production and manufacturing process reduces this risk, but the risk cannot be eliminated

PANZYGA can cause serious side effects. If any of the following problems occur after starting PANZYGA, stop the infusion immediately and contact your HCP or call emergency services:

- Hives, swelling in the mouth or throat, itching, trouble breathing, wheezing, fainting, or dizziness. These could be signs of a serious allergic reaction
- Bad headache with nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, fever, drowsiness, painful eye movements, and sensitivity to light. These could be signs of irritation and swelling of the lining around your brain

Please see Important Safety Information on adjacent page of this advertisement and Full Prescribing Information, including complete **BOXED WARNING, at www.PanzygaInfo.com.**

PANZYGA offers:

- **Improvement in arm and leg mobility, impairment symptoms, and hand strength***
- **Patient resources for each stage of your treatment experience**
 - Eligible, commercially insured patients taking PANZYGA may receive **co-pay assistance** of up to **\$5,000** per calendar year, or the cost of a patient's co-pay in a 12-month period (whichever is less) for claims received by the program[†]
 - Adult patients with CIDP starting PANZYGA may be eligible for a refund of their out-of-pocket PANZYGA drug costs through the **Pfizer Pledge Warranty Program.**[‡] Terms and conditions/eligibility requirements apply. See full terms and conditions at PanzygInfo.com.

*Depending on the ongoing therapy dose.

[†]Terms and conditions apply. See full terms and conditions at PanzygInfo.com.

[‡]Not available for residents of Puerto Rico.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (continued)

- Reduced urination, sudden weight gain, or swelling in your legs. These could be signs of a kidney problem (decreased kidney function or kidney failure)
- Pain, swelling, warmth, redness, or a lump in your legs or arms. These could be signs of a blood clot, which could happen in the heart, brain, lungs, or elsewhere in the body
- Brown or red urine, swelling, fatigue, fast heart rate, difficulty breathing, or yellow skin or eyes. These could be signs of a liver or blood problem
- Chest pain or trouble breathing, or blue lips or extremities. These could be signs of a serious heart or lung problem
- Fever over 100°F. This could be a sign of an infection
- Headache, fatigue or confusion, vision problem, chest pain, difficulty breathing, irregular heartbeat, or pounding in your chest, neck, or ears. These could be signs of high blood pressure

Ask your HCP whether you should have rescue medications available, such as antihistamines or epinephrine.

What are the possible or reasonably likely side effects for PANZYGA?

The most common side effects that may occur with PANZYGA are:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Fever
- Increased blood pressure
- Dermatitis
- Fatigue
- Abdominal pain
- Dizziness
- Anemia

These are not all the possible side effects. Talk to your HCP about any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

Tell your HCP if you are pregnant, or plan to become pregnant, or if you are nursing.

Patients should always ask their doctors for medical advice about adverse events.

You may report an adverse event related to Pfizer products by calling 1-800-438-1985 (US only). If you prefer, you may contact the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) directly. The FDA has established a reporting service known as MedWatch where healthcare professionals and consumers can report problems they suspect may be associated with the drugs and medical devices they prescribe, dispense, or use. Visit www.fda.gov/MedWatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

PANZYGA® is a registered trademark of Octapharma AG.

panzyga®

Immune Globulin
Intravenous (Human) - ifas
10% Liquid Preparation



**Talk to your doctor
about PANZYGA
and learn more at
PanzygInfo.com**

PANZYGA is FDA approved for 3 indications:

CIDP in adults

PI in patients 2 years of age or older

cITP in adults

 |  | Manufactured by Octapharma Pharmazeutika Produktionsges m.b.H.
Distributed by Pfizer Labs, Division of Pfizer Inc.

This brief summary highlights the most important information about PANZYGA. Please read it carefully before using PANZYGA and each time you have an infusion, as there may be new information. This brief summary does not take the place of talking with your healthcare provider about your medical condition or your treatment. If you have any questions after reading this, ask your healthcare provider. For more information, go to www.PanzygaInfo.com.

What is PANZYGA?

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Patients should always ask their doctors for medical advice about adverse events.

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This brief summary is based on the PANZYGA Prescribing Information (February 2021).

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one, you can prepare medicines for proper disposal at home. If the medication is a controlled substance, flush it down the toilet. (Do not do this for patches or transdermal medications.) If the medication is not a controlled substance, you can safely dispose of it at home. Here is the quick and easy way to do so:

- Partially fill an empty zip-top bag with soil, coffee grounds, kitty litter or another undesired substance. Add the medicine to the container and mix.

- Seal the bag and put it in your trash.

- De-identify the original medication container (if necessary) by scratching out personal information with a Sharpie or ripping off the label entirely.

What About Devices and Supplies?

Some medications are accompanied by supplies that could use some attention as well. Organize them in a way that makes them easy to access. Combine similar supplies together in Ziploc bags or small boxes so they are accessible when needed. If you use a variety of supplies for one medication or infusion, take the time at the beginning of the week or month to create a bag of all the supplies you need for it. That way, when infusion time comes, you can just grab the pre-packaged bag and proceed with administering your infusion, which is much easier than trying to locate them on the fly.

Some chronic illness patients also utilize devices used for therapeutic purposes, including massagers, breathing aids or even a fan. In addition to the device itself, there may be a charger or cord that connects the device to your phone or tablet. Keeping these cords and power supplies in one compact space will make them easier to access and readily use.

Where Do I Keep All My Stuff?

Now that your stuff is sorted, where should you store it? While it's common to keep prescriptions and over-the-counter medications in bathroom cabinets, you may want to consider moving them. Humidity in the bathroom may cause the composition of your medications to be altered, rendering them less effective. If you have an appropriately sized basket or tote, store your medications in that container in your bedroom, kitchen or another well-ventilated cool, dry room. You can even organize your medications in a multi-drawer organizer. Then, you can separate pill bottles, creams, devices, etc., in different drawers and label them for easy access.

If you are mainly bedbound, a rollout underbed storage container is a great way to store your medications and devices. This way, you can just reach under the bed, pull out the container to grab what you need, then push it back under the bed. If you have a nook where you like to spend a good amount of time, you can store your medications and devices in a cute but functional storage ottoman.

If you are not bedbound and spend a great deal of time at work, use one of your desk drawers to store your medications and devices. If you don't have this kind of office space available, take a small gym bag or travel bag with everything you may need in it to ensure you are comfortable in case your symptoms flare up. If you spend a decent amount of time in the car, it may be necessary to keep an emergency bag with extra supplies and medications as well (but be careful if you live in a hot state).

Combine like supplies together in Ziploc bags or small boxes so they are accessible when needed.

Don't Stress about "Someday"

It happens all too often: After trial and error trying to treat your condition(s), you are left with multiple medications meant to treat just one problem. Multiply that by each condition you have, close your eyes, click your heels and poof — you open your eyes, and an avalanche-worthy medicine cabinet, a mountain of medicine bottles or a mess of medications scattered all over the place becomes a not-so-organized mess, and yet, you're tempted to stash and stow all of it just in case.

If you're afraid to get rid of medicine, you're not alone. "I might need this medication someday!" is a common feeling, but it leads to accumulating excess medication over time. Don't be afraid to address the mess! Designate, eliminate, consolidate and discard your way to a more organized medicine cabinet and the peace of mind that comes along with it. 

SURAYYAH MORRIS, PharmD, is an autoimmune small fiber neuropathy patient from Central Florida. As a medication therapy management and pain management specialty pharmacist, she enjoys supporting patients with chronic pain and chronic conditions to help find balance and improve quality of life.