

10 things to do with OLD MEDICAL BOOKS

By **Elyse Pike**

I admit I am possibly one of the cheapest people on this planet. Not only am I cheap (I actually prefer the word frugal), but I am also a packrat, a compulsive keeper and a recycler. It breaks my heart to see good stuff go into the trash. So when it came time recently to cull my medical book collection, I had a hard time.

I needed to cull for two reasons:

1. Our library footprint is big and the hospital is crying for spaces for teaching rooms and computer instruction areas. So before the library space is wrenched from my hands by a cruel, unfeeling hospital facilities planner, I made a preemptive strike and chose to incorporate a small instructional space into the library proper. As a result, I need to free up some floor space.
2. Many of my books are old. Not dusty, mildewy, or spider-webby old, but old for a medical book, whose useful life is about five years. Besides, we have the most recent editions available electronically.

I now have boxes and boxes of pristine, older textbooks that I want to find a second use for. Used bookstores are not interested. Our local public library book sale kindly but firmly declined my offer of the 15 boxes. Donations to underdeveloped countries sounded good until I dug and found donations were welcome as long as material is less than five years old. Dumping the boxes seemed to be my

last resort, but we have to pay tipping fees and these have increased lately. In this tight market, dumping is not an attractive option.

In desperation, I came up with these next 10 alternative ideas:

1. Place them in four equal piles two-feet high, glue them together, and use as supports for a sheet of glass. Now you have a lovely coffee table.
2. Make a hollow book to hide treasures or use as a jewelry box. Instructions at [wikihow.com/Make-a-Hollow-Book](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Hollow-Book). No one will question why you have a 15-year-old *Merck Manual* on your shelf. Your valuables will be as safe as safe can be.
3. Give them to your mother-in-law. My mother-in-law treats her cats like her babies, so perhaps she would like the outdated *Rudolph's Pediatrics* to help her resolve some of Sweetums's veterinary needs.
4. Use the books' pretty illustrations as Christmas wrapping paper. Nothing says "festive" quite like the step-by-step colour illustrations for keyhole surgery of gall stones.
5. Use a pile of these books for step aerobics. Add a new challenge to your aerobics workout by stepping on and off the three-volume surgical pathology set. You will no longer need to visit the gym. Save on gas and parking fees, and who cares if you aren't wear-

- ing the latest in workout wear (or any workout wear for that matter!).
6. Use as a booster seat. When small bodies can't reach the table, use a copy of *Canadian Pharmaceutical Specialties* to bring them up to eye level. Those slick, shiny covers wipe right off in case of spills.
 7. Rip out pages, ball them up, and use as fire starters. Fuel costs are rising as the economy tanks. This could be the only way to keep warm this year.
 8. Children's crafts. Two words: papier mâché!
 9. Personal use for self-diagnosis. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* surely has something in it to appeal to everyone. Tip: the *DSM* gives great tips on symptoms if you need a few days off and want to claim mental fatigue.
 10. Construction material. In the end, I think I am just going to pile up my discards and use them to build the new wall for the instruction room in my hospital's library. Medical books are solid, strong, and have great insulation value. It's a cheap solution, and *Holmes on Homes* would be proud.

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is the medical librarian for Grey Bruce Health Services, Owen Sound, and she is adding a classroom to her library. Unfortunately the building code does not recognize medical textbooks as structurally sound. library@gbhs.on.ca