



Medicine & Your Child:

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS
ON ADHERENCE AND
ADMINISTRATION

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INTRODUCTION

Taking medication can be a difficult task for many children and adolescents, as well as their parents. There are three main causes for these problems: lack of understanding of illness and/or purpose of medication, emotional reasons related to being ill and/or having to take medications, and physical difficulties related to swallowing medications and managing side effects. While this task often feels hopeless to parents, there are several ways to help make medication administration an easy part of your child's daily routine. This booklet will review these three main areas and provide suggestions for parents on how to address their child's specific difficulties.

While reviewing the information in this booklet, parents should keep in mind that all children develop these skills at a different pace, depending on their developmental age and the demands of their medication regimen. Children who begin taking medications at a younger age tend to have less difficulty than those children who experience a lifestyle change later in life. Additionally, simple medication regimens tend to be less difficult than those that require changes in multiple aspects of your child's life (i.e., activity restriction, diet changes, etc.). It is important to provide age appropriate education to your child and remain patient and positive throughout the process.

SAMPLE TEACHING CHART

Pill Swallowing Progress Chart		
Trial	Type of Candy Used	Number of Successful Swallows
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Even after trying several different options, some children still have difficulties taking medication. It is important for parents to maintain a positive attitude. It can be helpful to take breaks when things become too challenging, so that both you and your child can calm down. Remember to stay kind but firm, reminding them that taking medicine is not a choice, but that you are there to help make the process as easy as possible.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Helpful Positioning for Pill-Swallowing

- Your child's posture also affects swallowing ability. Standing up is the best position, however, sitting down is also feasible so long as your child sits up straight.
- Teach your child not to throw their head back as this gives a straight shot to their "windpipe." It's safer to have them hold their head straight or even tip it forward to avoid choking.
- It can also be helpful to allow your child to hold something comforting, such as a blanket or stuffed animal.

Helpful Hints when Teaching Pill-Swallowing

- It is important to approach pill swallowing as your child learning a new skill, like dressing, or jumping rope.
- Do not bargain or bribe your child to take medication. Bargains/bribes will likely cause your child to take medicine to earn a reward, rather than because it is a habit, an expected part of growing up, or good for them. Keep in mind:
 - Bribes are often offered once a child has refused meds or is having problems taking them. Rewards, are laid out in advance, are previously identified and are typically small, like stickers on a sticker chart.
- Use brief and short commands, in a positive tone: "Sit up straight", "Put the pill on your tongue", "Drink the water."
- Modeling pill swallowing for your child is helpful. Adults can demonstrate using vitamins, candy, or sugar filled gelcaps.
- When switching to a bigger pill, say "Let's try the *next* one." Do not say "Let's try the *bigger* one."

MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION: General Guidelines

- **ALWAYS TALK TO A DOCTOR/PHARMACIST BEFORE CUTTING OR CRUSHING PILLS.**
 - This may change the way a pill is supposed to dissolve in your stomach.
 - It can make the medication less effective and/or cause unpleasant side effects.
 - Sometimes cutting/crushing pills makes the pill taste worse.
- **Be aware of pill labels**
 - There are many medications that lose their effectiveness or produce unpleasant side effects when mixed with certain beverages or foods.
 - Some medications need to be taken with food/liquid, while others require your child to take them on an empty stomach.
- **Always use appropriate medication dispensers**
 - Appropriate tools include:
 - Droppers
 - Oral syringes (no needle)
 - Cylindrical Dosage Spoons
 - Dosage Cups
 - Never use a kitchen spoon as measurements are not as exact and can cause your child to not get the proper amount of medication.



MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION: General Guidelines

- **Be honest and sympathetic**
 - "I know that you don't like taking medicine, but your body needs the medicine to feel strong"
 - "I'm sorry it tastes bad. We can mix it with anything you like."
 - Do not hide medicines in your children's food/drinks
 - *NEVER* tell children that pills are candy.

- **Be firm and give a reason**
 - "You have to take it or you won't get well."
 - "This medication is important because it..."
 - Do not waiver on missing doses, the more structured and consistent administrations are the more your child will learn and value their importance.

- **Don't attack self-esteem or criticize your child**
 - Avoid saying things like "You're acting like a baby"
 - Talk about specific difficulties and work together to find solutions.

- **Don't punish with spanking or yelling**
 - Medication administration should not be an aversive process.
 - *NEVER* physically force your child to take their medications—i.e., holding your child down.

- **Praise and hug your child for all cooperation**
 - Emphasize that your child is doing a great job taking care of themselves.
 - Providing your child with a sense of control when possible is

TEACHING PILL SWALLOWING

Materials:

- Glass of water, juice, or other liquid
- 3-5 different sizes of cookie decorators or candy, sprinkles, nerds, tic-tacs, skittles, m&m's, mike&ikes
**** BE SURE TO USE CANDY THAT DISSOLVES EASILY IN ORDER TO PREVENT RISK OF CHOKING.**
- A chart you can use to track your progress.

Step 1: Have child place one of the smallest size candies on their tongue. In the front is close enough. Then take a small sip of water. Then swallow. This should be easy as the sugary sprinkle is likely to just dissolve sitting on your tongue before you drink the water. You can repeat this step a few times to get comfortable with it. Only swallow one at a time.

Step 2: Try again, having the child place the next sized candies on their tongue, and then sipping water and swallowing. When he/she is able to do this for at least 5 trials, move on to the next step.

Step 3: Repeat step 2 with increasingly bigger sized candies until you reach pill-sized candy. This step may take longer to get comfortable with, but after doing the other size candies, the child will find it is much easier.

Step 4: Once your child has mastered swallowing pill-sized candies, you can try practicing with sugar-filled gelcaps. This will help ensure that your child can swallow what looks like medication.

** It is very important to remember to keep a **positive attitude**, as well as to encourage and praise your child frequently through the learning process, just as if you were teaching them to ride a bike.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS TO SWALLOW A PILL

Ways to Facilitate Swallowing:

- Numb your child's mouth/throat by having him/her suck on a popsicle/ice beforehand.
- Some children find it helpful to coat the inside of their mouths with something sticky like maple syrup.
- Serve medicine cold or with a cold drink to reduce the taste.
- Enhance salivation. Dry mouth makes pill swallowing more difficult. It can be helpful to have your child drink some liquids just before putting the pill into their mouth.
- Drinking a carbonated beverage straight from the bottle may also prove helpful, because the bubbles make the pill not as easy to detect and the motion of drinking from the bottle can help the pill go down.
- For some children, using a straw to drink the water or beverage helps because the suction used to pull the liquid through the straw makes it easier to swallow the pill. With this method, many kids concentrate on the straw and don't think about the pill, so it goes down easily.
- Try using a spoonful of jam or jelly to help your child swallow the pill. Since it's sweet, it will mask any bad flavor, and jelly is slimy and goes right down. You could also use pudding, yogurt,



INFANTS: (birth- age 2)



- Infants should be administered medications via a syringe (oral syringes do not have a needle), dropper, or calibrated spoon.
- The parent should hold the baby in a cradling position and open their child's mouth by gently pulling down on their chin.
- Place the syringe/dropper in the corner of the baby's mouth and discharge the medicine slowly.
- Sometimes blowing softly in an infant's face triggers a swallow reflex.
- For active infants, sometimes it is helpful to gently wrap the baby in a blanket.

6 YOUNG CHILDREN: (age 2- age 5)

- Young children sometimes refuse medications. Parents should explain the purpose of the medicine in clear and simple terms.
 - Help the child understand that medication is supposed to make them better.
 - If there are negative side effects, be sure to explain these to the child upfront and talk with them about what could improve the side effects. Helpful suggestions are offered later in the guide.
- Administer medications consistently. It is helpful to administer medications at the same time and location to establish a routine.
 - Do not waiver on missing doses, the more structured and consistent administrations are the more your child will learn their value and importance.
- Some children do better when distracted. This can be accomplished by providing them with a favorite toy or allowing them to watch a favorite TV show/movie.
- Provide choices! Allow your child to have control over an otherwise uncontrollable situation. Be firm that your child does not get to choose whether or not they take the medicine, but they can decide:
 - What medication to take first/last
 - What drink/snack they want to take with meds
 - When manageable, you can allow your child to hold the spoon or syringe to take their own medications
 - Allow your child to help with the mixing process of crushed/dissolvable medications.

ALTERNATIVES TO PILL SWALLOWING 11

• Dissolving tablets



- The pills are crushed and mixed with liquids, then placed in an oral syringe. Then, you can slowly squirt the mixture into your child's mouth. A syringe is likely to be used with the younger kids.
- If you dissolve the medicine into a liquid, be sure to dissolve it into a small amount of liquid that you are sure your child will finish in order to receive the full dose.

• Gelcaps

- Medications with bad flavor are more tolerable if they are crushed and then put in gelatin capsules. This is also helpful for large pills, which can then be taken in multiple smaller tablets. These capsules are available at pharmacies for a nominal fee and come in several sizes, with the smaller numbers designating larger sizes.
- Gelcaps are often easier to swallow when dipped in ice water prior to swallowing, as it makes the coating slippery.



• Patches

• Injections



10 ALTERNATIVES TO PILL SWALLOWING

- **Liquids, Syrups, Elixirs**
 - Some pills can be dissolved with liquids and then administered in a syringe or cup.
 - Some pharmacies are also now able to flavor liquid medications with a variety of different flavors at a low cost. Talk to your pharmacist about options.
- **Crushed or Opened Capsules**
 - Use a pill crusher and be cautious to not lose any of the pill
 - Add it to favorite foods that do not require chewing:

-Pudding	-Jell-O
-Yogurt	-Applesauce
-Baby Food	-Peanut Butter
-Nutella	-Chocolate Syrup
-Jelly	-Ice Cream
-Kool-Aid	-Maple Syrup
 - Be sure your child finishes entire serving to ensure that full dosage is taken (helpful to limit serving size to 1 or 2 tbsp.).
 - For pills with a bad taste, use sweeter foods to help mask the medication flavor. You can also use foods with thicker textures, such as nutella or peanut butter.
 - There is a product is available at some pharmacies, called Flavor-X. The pharmacy can take the meds, crush them, make them into a suspension and flavor them with almost any flavor you choose --there are over 40 flavors.
 - SwallowAid is a gel format aid. It contains ingredients that stimulate saliva flow, lubricates the mouth and throat to prevent pills from overstaying in the oral cavity, flavorants that mask bad taste, fragrances that mask bad smells, demulcents for lubrication, etc.

OLDER CHILDREN: (age 6-age 11)

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- Older children are typically able to understand the importance of their medications. Therefore this age range is when parents should engage their children in their own care so that they can begin to develop responsibility for their own health.
- By age 6, children should be able to start taking their medications in pill form. This is an important skill to learn, as the amount of liquid medication your child will have to take to equal a pill dose will increase significantly with age.
- Allow your children to exert some control. This is best done through providing choices.
 - What medication to take first/last
 - What drink/snack they want to take their meds with
 - At this age, your child should be able to hold the spoon or syringe to take their own medications.

ADOLESCENTS: (age 12-age 18)

- Adolescents are able to understand the importance of their medications, but are more prone to demonstrate resistance to taking their medication. This resistance stems from aspects of normal adolescent development which include:
 - A sense of immortality
 - Resistance to parental and medical authority
 - The need to assert control
 - The desire to establish their independence
- This is also a stage of life where social relationships are crucial to one's sense of self. Therefore, 'being different' by having to take medications is often rejected in an attempt to remain 'normal.'
 - There are several creative ways to help your adolescent take medication in public without drawing attention to themselves. For example:
 - Some adolescents will use mint containers to store their medicines for the day.
 - Adolescents can excuse themselves to the bathroom to take medications privately.
- It is recommended that parents:
 - Be supportive of these changes and remain aware of the difficulties they present to the adolescent
 - Work with the adolescent in developing a plan of care which allows the adolescent to exert control and increase their responsibility, while allowing the parent to feel confident his/her child's medical needs are being met.
 - Remind adolescents that tending to their own health needs demonstrates maturity and trustworthiness.

ADOLESCENTS TRANSITIONING TO EARLY ADULthood

- Adolescence is an important time for parents to transition responsibility to their children. Specifically, this is a time to make sure your adolescent learns:
 - The names and doses of their medications
 - It can also be helpful to have your adolescent carry a list of their medications in the purse/wallet in the event of an emergency
 - Their medication schedule
 - Some adolescents benefit from using a watch or cell phone alarm as a reminder for taking their medications
 - How to fill their own pill boxes
 - First, have your adolescent observe you fill the pill box. Then you should observe the adolescent fill the pill box several times until you are confident your adolescent has mastered this task.
 - How to call in refills for their medications
 - Again, parents should have their adolescent observe them call in refills, then remain present while their adolescent calls in refills until the parent is confident the adolescent has mastered this task.
 - Scheduling doctor appointments
 - Adolescents should be involved in planning of appointments. Parents should encourage them to schedule their own appointments and keep track of them in their planner/cell phone calendar.
 - Advocating for themselves at medical appointments by

