

Helping Your Child Take Medicine

This handout offers strategies and tips to help your child take medicine. These are ideas that have worked for other parents, caregivers, and children. We hope they work for you, too.

How to talk to your child about taking medicine



When talking to your child about taking medicine, use simple and honest language to explain why they need it. Let them know in advance when it will be time to take the medicine to make it less of a surprise. Have a positive attitude when giving them the medicine and praise them afterward for taking it.

Help your child feel in control

When children are sick, they often feel like they have little to no control in their lives. It is important to give them some choices to help them feel more in control. While taking medicine is not optional, you can let them decide how they want to take it. Offering choices can help make the process easier for them.

Here are some ways that you can give your child choices when taking medicine:

- To help your child remember to take their medicine, it is important to create a plan together and write it down. Practice the plan frequently.
- Encourage your child to pretend to give medicine to their toys, such as a doll, puppet, or stuffed animal. This is called “medical play” and can help your child work out feelings related to taking medication.
- Incorporate medicine time into their daily routine and use a reward chart to track progress.

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To Learn More

- Child Life
206-987-2037
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



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- If they are old enough, involve them in preparing and taking their medicine. Never leave children alone to take their medicine.
- Be creative and find new ways to make taking medicine more enjoyable for your child.

How to make liquid medicine easier to take

If your child has trouble taking liquid medicine because it tastes bad, there are several things you can try.

- Ask your pharmacist if they can add something to make the medicine taste better.
- You can use a syringe without a needle to give medicine. Ask your pharmacist or healthcare provider about getting a liquid medication syringe.
- You can mix the medicine with a strong flavor like powdered drink mix or syrup. Check with your pharmacist to make sure it will not harm the effectiveness.
- Before taking the medicine, have your child eat something cold like Popsicles or ice chips to dull the taste.
- After taking the medicine, have your child drink juice or suck on a lollipop to get rid of the aftertaste.
- Coating their tongue with something sticky like maple syrup might also help dull the taste.
- Let your child have a choice in how they want to take the medicine.

How to give medicines that can be crushed or powdered

To make medicine taste better, you can mix crushed pills or powdered medicine with food or juice. It is important to let your child know that you are doing this, so they do not feel deceived. If this method does not work, they may start avoiding certain foods.

- Pills can be crushed using a spoon or pill crusher.
- You can mix the crushed pills with soft foods like applesauce or yogurt, or liquids like cherry syrup or orange juice. Check with your pharmacist to make sure it will not harm the effectiveness.
- Encourage your child to practice swallowing small amounts of these foods without chewing before adding the medicine.
- For syrups, dissolve crushed pills in a spoon with a little water and then add the syrup.
- For juices, add crushed pills to a small amount of juice and have your child follow it with a drink of their choice.

How to teach kids to swallow pills

Many children can learn how to swallow pills with practice, but it may be difficult for some depending on their comfort level. Children who are at least 5 years old can start to learn how to swallow pills. Adult supervision is recommended.

- Gel caps can be used to mask the taste of pills and make them easier to swallow. Dipping the gel cap in ice water can make it slippery and easier to swallow.

- Children can practice pill swallowing techniques by starting with small candies and gradually increasing the size as they gain confidence.
- Pills can also be mixed with Jell-O, pudding, or yogurt to make them easier to swallow. Cutting pills into smaller pieces and putting them into fruit snacks or wrapping them in fruit roll-ups can also make them easier to take.

If tips and tricks do not work

Even when you have tried everything, some children may still struggle to take medicine. Taking a break before giving them medicine may help them calm down. If that does not work, here are several strategies other parents have used.

- It is important to be kind but firm with your child and let them know that taking medicine is not optional.
- You can assist by pressing down on their chin or using your finger to push down their lower jaw.
- It is also helpful to keep their mouth closed until they swallow the medicine and ensure they are sitting up straight.
- Ask someone else to help. Sit your child on their lap. They can give a “hug hold” from behind by wrapping their arms around your child and holding their arms and head while the other adult gives the medicine.
- Each time you give them medicine, give them the chance to succeed.

References

- **Helping Kids Take Medicine**
kidshealth.org/en/parents/take-medicine.html