



Pharmacy Department

## Information for Tablet / Capsule Swallowing

A training guide for parents, carers and children

### Introduction

Swallowing tablets or capsules is an important skill for children to learn. Using sweets that are easy to swallow can be an effective way of practising taking tablets or capsules.

Parents can teach children this skill using small sweets and gradually increase to larger sized sweets, which are comparable in size to tablets or capsules

### The benefits of taking tablets and capsules include:

- More treatment options for certain conditions. Not all medicines are readily available in liquid.
- More convenient to administer especially when at school or on holiday as some medicines require refrigeration and may be bulky to store.
- More acceptable to children when taking in front of their friends (especially as the child becomes a teenager).
- Liquid medicines often have a short expiry.
- Some liquid medicines have an unpleasant taste.
- It is easier to simplify treatment using tablets or capsules (e.g. modified release once daily tablets or capsules instead of taking liquid multiple times a day). This may improve patient compliance.
- Tablets or capsules contain controlled amounts of medicine unlike liquids which may vary when administered on spoons.

### How to start to teach your child

Keep calm. An anxious parent urging a sick child to swallow is not a good combination. Make sure the exercise is fun and relaxed, and keep sessions short (no more than 15 minutes) so your child does not become tired or stressed. Encourage your child's success along the way and be supportive.

### You will need

- Cake decorating balls or sprinkles
- Tic-Tacs ®
- Mini M&Ms ®
- M&Ms ® or Smarties ®



## What to do

1. Ask your child to take a few sips of water or their favourite drink to moisten their mouth and throat.
2. Start with the smallest sized sweet (e.g. cake decorating balls or sprinkles). Explain to your child that you are going to teach them a simple way to swallow pills.
3. Show them by putting a single sweet towards the back of your tongue, taking a gulp of water and swallowing the sweet.
4. Tell your child it is their turn. They should keep trying to swallow the sweet for up to three times. If by their third attempt they have been unable to swallow the sweet they can chew it instead.
  - Tip** Your child can try different head positions when swallowing, e.g. head tilted back, slightly forward, in the centre, to the left and to the right. Let your child find which head position suits them best.
  - Tip** Offer a straw and encourage the child to drink through it. Many children will concentrate on the straw and not think about sweets or pills, so it goes down easily.
  - Tip** A reward chart to praise your child's achievement is an effective way to encourage them to move up the next size sweets.
5. Repeat this until your child is comfortable with a particular sized sweet – this usually takes about three successful tries. Then move up to a slightly larger size sweet and repeat the procedure until there is success at this level.
  - Tip** If your child runs into problems when swallowing, try again with a smaller sweet to build up their confidence again
6. Continue to move up to a larger sizes until your child succeeds swallowing a sweet of a comfortable size to a pill (e.g. M&Ms® or Smarties®). At this point your child should be able to swallow most pills with minimal problems.

## Other handy tips

Give your child some food to chew (e.g. toast or marshmallow) before placing the tablet in their mouth so they will swallow the food and tablet together.

**Please Note:** Some tablets are not suitable for chewing. Consult your pharmacist before trying this method.

Mix small tablets/capsules with ice-cream, yoghurt or jelly can to reduce taste or help with swallowing. Avoid tricking your child by hiding tablets/capsules in food.

**Please note:** Some medicines are not suitable to take with food. Consult your pharmacist before trying this method.



## For further information

The University of Calgary website 'Better than a spoonful of sugar – how to swallow pills', which contains videos showing ways to teach children to swallow tablets or capsules:

[www.research4kids.ucalgary.ca/pillswallowing](http://www.research4kids.ucalgary.ca/pillswallowing)

More helpful tips can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/swallowing-pills/Pages/swallowing-pills.aspx>

<http://www.bpac.org.nz/Supplement/2014/September/pillswallowing.aspx>

<https://northernpaediatrics.com/kidzmed/>

This leaflet only gives general information. You must always discuss the individual treatment of your child with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your child's treatment.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.

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