

Oral Medication Administration

● SKILL SNAPSHOT

Purpose

- Safely delivers medication through the mouth for gastrointestinal absorption or local oral effect.

When to use

- Ordered oral tablets, capsules, liquids, powders, or other formulations when swallowing and GI function are appropriate.

Supplies needed

- MAR/order; medications; calibrated oral syringe/cup; water; gloves; pill splitter/crusher only when verified safe.

● PREP + PATIENT SETUP

- Verify rights, allergies, indication, timing, food interactions, labs/vitals, and hold parameters.
- Assess alertness, swallowing ability, NPO status, nausea/vomiting, GI function, and aspiration risk.

● VAULT TIP

- The final safety check is not the medication cup—it is seeing that this patient can and did take the dose safely.

● STEP-BY-STEP

1. Hand hygiene; identify patient with two identifiers; compare each medication with MAR/order at required checkpoints.
2. Review indication, allergies, last dose, required assessments, and patient questions.
3. Prepare medications for one patient at a time. Keep unit-dose packages labeled until bedside verification.
4. Measure liquid at eye level on a flat surface using a calibrated device; use an oral syringe for small/precise doses.
5. Do not crush, split, open, or mix a medication unless the exact formulation is verified safe.
6. Position patient upright, ideally at least 45-90 degrees. Provide dentures, glasses, and preferred allowed fluid as needed.
7. Explain each medication. Honor the patient's right to refuse and address concerns before administration.
8. Give pills one at a time or in a safe number based on swallowing assessment. Do not rush.
9. Stay until medications are swallowed when policy/clinical condition requires; inspect mouth for pocketing when indicated.
10. For liquids, avoid household spoons and ensure full dose is consumed. Do not mix into a full meal the patient may not finish.
11. Keep patient upright after administration as clinically appropriate. Monitor for coughing, choking, vomiting, or aspiration.
12. Document immediately after administration, never before. Reassess therapeutic and adverse effects at the appropriate interval.

● SAFETY REMINDERS

- Never give oral medication to an unresponsive patient or one without a safe swallow.
- Respect NPO and procedure-specific restrictions; clarify exceptions.
- Do not leave medications unattended.
- If vomiting occurs, do not automatically repeat the dose.

● COMMON MISTAKES

- Using one identifier.
- Crushing modified-release medication.
- Mixing dose into a large food portion.
- Documenting before patient swallows.

● DOCUMENTATION

- Medication, dose, oral route, time.
- Pre/post assessments and response.
- Swallowing/tolerance and assistance.
- Refusal, held/omitted/vomited dose.
- Teaching and notifications.