

Medication Administration Routes

● SKILL SNAPSHOT**Purpose**

- Matches the prescribed medication formulation with the correct body route, technique, onset, and monitoring needs.

When to use

- Every medication administration and whenever route clarity, access, swallowing, absorption, or clinical condition changes.

Supplies needed

- MAR/order; route-appropriate medication/formulation and device; drug reference; PPE; required assessment equipment.

● PREP + PATIENT SETUP

- Verify the written route and that the formulation is designed for it.
- Assess swallowing, GI function, skin/mucosa, vascular access, respiratory ability, and route-specific contraindications.

● VAULT TIP

- Route is part of the medication order, not a convenience choice. Match drug, device, anatomy, and patient.

● STEP-BY-STEP

1. Identify patient and verify medication rights, allergies, indication, dose, time, and exact route.
2. Oral: confirm swallowing and positioning; do not crush modified-release/enteric or otherwise restricted products.
3. Sublingual: place under tongue; do not chew or swallow; avoid food/drink until dissolved.
4. Buccal: place between cheek and gum; allow to dissolve without chewing/swallowing.
5. Enteral tube: verify placement/patency; give each medication separately with prescribed flushes; never mix into formula.
6. Topical/transdermal: use gloves, remove prior product/patch, apply to correct intact site, and prevent transfer.
7. Ophthalmic/otic/nasal: verify correct organ and side; keep applicator sterile/clean and follow age/anatomy technique.
8. Inhaled: match device to patient; coach breathing technique and evaluate respiratory response.
9. Subcutaneous/intradermal/IM: select correct site, needle, angle, volume, and tissue depth.
10. IV: confirm access, patency, compatibility, concentration, dilution, and exact rate; monitor closely.
11. Rectal/vaginal: provide privacy, position correctly, use route-specific formulation, and assess contraindications.
12. Document route and site where relevant. Evaluate onset, therapeutic effect, and adverse effects expected for that route.

● SAFETY REMINDERS

- Never substitute a route without a new/clarified order.
- Wrong-route errors can be fatal, especially enteral-to-IV misconnections.
- Formulations are not automatically interchangeable across routes.
- Trace every tube/line from source to patient.

● COMMON MISTAKES

- Assuming PO and tube administration are identical.
- Using otic drops in the eye.
- Crushing sublingual/extended-release medication.
- Connecting enteral product to IV access.

● DOCUMENTATION

- Medication, dose, exact route, time.
- Site/side and device when relevant.
- Pre/post assessment and response.
- Teaching/refusal.
- Route clarification, adverse effects, notifications.