



## Taking medication

### Learning to take medicine is a life skill

Helping your child learn to take medicine can be hard. Often, it can feel more stressful than learning other things as there may be a time pressure. The good news is, children can learn to do this, just like other things! Having positive experiences will support them to learn this skill and provide a greater chance of success when you need it.

#### Create a plan:

Being prepared is key to success. You will have already thought about the options that are most suited to your child, and considered what to do if you need a plan B.

#### Things to consider:

Talk to your pharmacist so you understand the options. Is this a medication that can be mixed with food? Is there an alternative if your child is unable to manage it?

#### How will I talk to my child about the medicine?

- Always keep the **language positive** and use words that they understand. Try to give your child a reason for the medicine and explain that it is a helper.
- **Avoid any threats** - *"If you don't take it, you will go to hospital and have a needle"*. This sets up a negative association with healthcare. Instead, try *"This feels hard, let's work out how to do it together, it's important that we have it to help fight off the infection"*.
- **Avoid** talking about the medication **tasting bad**, this reinforces that it will! *"It tastes different to the things you usually have. This is the medicine we need to help you feel better. Let's have a different drink straight after"*.

#### What approach should I use?

- Always make sure that you are in a calm and ready state, with the time available to support your child. This will get easier as they develop the skill.
- Think about how much notice your child usually needs to do something challenging.
- Consider what might work best while you are giving the medicine. Some children respond well to distractions, such as while they are playing or watching something. Others might need quiet and a more engaged approach.
- What will you do after? It's always good to have something to look forward to.
- How do you normally approach learning a new skill (toilet training, bike riding). Does your child help make choices? Do you work towards something with a sticker chart?

#### What happens if they refuse?

Like any skill, if you try for too long it will become stressful and less likely to end in success. Consider pausing and returning to this a few minutes later with a different approach. Talk with your doctor if you are struggling, or if you are missing doses.

**Honesty is essential for trust, and will help develop the skill. Avoid saying it will only happen once if more is needed, or that the medicine will taste good.**



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### Liquid medications

Make it playful! Children explore and learn through play. Playing with equipment, such as syringes make them familiar, rather than something that is always associated with stress. Let your child lead the play, trust they will give it a go when they are ready.

#### Syringe play ideas:

- Use them in the bathtub or outdoors for water play, or watering the plants
- Try coloured water to prepare for different types of medicines.
- Have sips of preferred drinks out of syringes, helping your child master the technique of squeezing it in. They may like to do their own medicine when ready.
- Get messy! Fill syringes with paint (mix a tiny bit of dish soap to thin) and get creative.
- Decorate your medicine syringes with stickers.
- Syringes can make great playdough plungers.

Pretend play gives children the opportunity to rehearse challenging events. They can practice and observe various ways of doing things, and master techniques. Let your child lead the play and listen in. You may get some hints of how they may like their medicine.

- Play doctors with teddies or family members, all practice taking medicine (what language is your child using while doing this?).
- Show different options in pretend play - does the teddy want a cup or syringe?
- Celebrate teddy's success, so the child recognises that you see this is hard.
- Imagine your medicine will give you a super power. What will it be? Have some props ready to transform when they give it a go.

**Aiming the syringe to the lower and back part of the cheek hits less taste buds and is harder to spit out than the middle of the tongue. Medication may be more palatable if refrigerated - check with your pharmacist if this is okay.**

### Transitioning from liquid to tablets

Again, remember this is a new skill and may take some time. Always check with your pharmacist before mixing food or drinks with any medication.

Ideas to support transition:

- Be a detective - have your child ask others how they take tablets. This will give them a few different options to try.
- Make sure your child understands why it is necessary.
- Try with water or juice - use a sports bottle, a cup, or a straw.
- Try in a spoon of something soft like yoghurt, jelly, or mousse.
- Flatten and wrap a small piece of bread around it to minimise the taste and texture.

Practice with something they already eat of a similar size - try not to chew! Draw up a chart and mark the success so they can see they have achieved this.