

Tips to help your child to take medicine



Convincing a child to take medicine can sometimes be a difficult task. Children often don't want to take medicine. This might be because they find it unpleasant or scary. They may also not understand why they have to take it. This leaflet aims to give you some tips on making the process easier for both you and your child.

Talking it through with your child

- Talk to your child and find out what is wrong; why do they not want to take the medicine? It is important that you acknowledge their fears (that it tastes horrible, etc.) as this helps you to talk with them about how you can make it better.
- It is important that your child understands why they have to take the medicine and what could happen if they don't take it. However, don't try to scare your child into taking the medicine!
- Reassure your child that they are not having to take the medicine because they have been naughty.
- Be calm but firm and give your child honest explanations. Talk about it in a way that doesn't make your child feel like they are failing or letting you down.

Common reasons children won't take medicine

- not understanding why they need to take it
- not liking the taste or texture
- having difficulty swallowing tablets or capsules.

Giving the medicine

- Find out which way your child prefers to take the medicine, such as from a spoon, syringe, dropper, or drinking from a cup or straw. Ask them where they would like to be when they take the medicine (on your knee, on the sofa, in bed).
- Find out from your doctor whether liquid medicine can be mixed with food or liquid. It may taste nicer with a small amount of juice,

honey or chocolate spread, or something else nice-tasting to wash it down. Do not dilute the medicine too much though or it may take you a long time to get your child to take it all.

- Most taste buds are at the back of the tongue, so try putting the medicine in your child's cheek to lessen the taste. With older children, a drink of icy cold water before taking the medicine can also reduce the taste.
- Role playing can be helpful with young children. Pretending to give a favourite doll or teddy some medicine too can make it more fun. Try to make taking their medicine as fun as possible.
- If your child finds it difficult to swallow tablets and capsules, putting them in a spoonful of soft food may help, such as yoghurt. Find out from your doctor if the tablets can be crushed or the capsules can be opened. The powdered medicine can then be added to something to disguise the taste.
- Establish a routine, so the medicine is always taken at the same time. Maybe before a favourite TV show or activity, so there is something positive to do afterwards.
- Setting a time limit to take the medicine sometimes works well, such as counting to ten/twenty or using an egg timer.
- Try not to involve too many people. It can be overwhelming to have many family members trying to persuade your child to take their medicine. A calm one to one approach is often nicer and more effective.
- Children are more likely to cooperate if they are given some choice, rather than just being told what to do. Try giving a limited choice of options, such as 'Do you want apple or orange juice with your medicine?' or 'Do you want your medicine before or after breakfast?'. This lets your child know that taking the medicine is something they have to do, but gives them some element of control.
- If you want to, you can use rewards to persuade your child to take their medicine, such as 'I will take you to buy a toy if you take your medicine all week'. However, don't make a promise that you can't stick to, as your child may then not react to this tactic the next time.

Praise and rewards

- Always give lots of praise and reward when medicine is taken, even if the process has been long or difficult.
- Stickers and reward charts work very well. Promise a small or simple reward once your child has collected a certain amount of stickers, gold stars, etc. Great reward chart ideas can be found on the internet, or you can make one specifically for your child using their favourite toy, character, etc.
- Try to do a positive, fun activity after your child takes the medicine. This gives your child some motivation to take it again.

There may be days when none of these strategies work. Take a break and try again later – don't give up! If the problem persists, speak to your child's doctor or pharmacist, they may be able to give your child another type of medication with a different taste, texture or as a liquid instead of tablets.

Keep reminding your child how important taking the medicine is and how happy you are when they take it.

Good luck!

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

Sally Hitchings
Play Specialist, Accident and Emergency
June 2015
Review: June 2018
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust
Oxford OX3 9DU
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

