



## How to Get Your Child to Take Medicine

Most parents will agree that giving their kids medicine can be a challenge. Not only do most medicines taste somewhat nasty, but also when your child is sick, they are usually irritable and somewhat nasty themselves! However, there are ways to pull out your Mary Poppins bag full of tricks and avoid fights so that you can help your child feel better.

### Babies and Infants

If the medication is an oral liquid, you can use a syringe and deposit drops of the medicine between the baby's cheek and tongue, allowing each droplet to be swallowed until the full dose gets down. Another great option is to put the full dose of liquid medicine into a bottle nipple (separated from the bottle) and to hold the nipple to the baby's mouth. They will likely suck the medicine from the nipple so fast that they never get a chance to protest the dose! This method can also work well for some older children. Medication doses can be divided into small aliquots delivered in a dosing syringe (ask your pharmacist for some extras when you pick up the medication). Rather than have your child swig it down all at once, chase down each mini dose with a bit of water or a drink your kid likes. If it's a dose of 20 milliliters, take 5 or 10 at a time so they have a little break to have a little sip of liquid, as long as they're getting all of the medicine.

### A Spoon Full of Sugar . . .

Mary Poppins was right, after all! A spoon full of sugar DOES make the medicine go down. This is where you get to put on your creative parent hat and mix the dose of medicine with a small amount of a favorite food or treat. Foods like chocolate syrup, Nutella, pudding, or melted popsicles will not only help medicine taste better, but they can also make it a more enjoyable experience for your child. If all else fails, mix the dose with a small amount of cake frosting and decorate a cookie with it! What kid (or adult, for that matter) says NO to a frosted cookie?!?

If it's a pill, you can put it in a teaspoon dollop of Marshmallow FLUFF or a cube of Jell-O. Just ensure they can still swallow the food without it becoming a choking hazard.

Another trick we like is incentivizing taking medicine with a swig of chocolate milk afterward. Milk coats the tongue and quickly rids the palette of any disgusting flavors.

If the medicine can be taken with food, time to get creative. Is pizza your kid's favorite? Can the pill be crushed up? They'll never know the difference if you sprinkle it in with cheese and sauce.

Strong-tasting drinks can work too. Strawberry or chocolate milk and fruit juices are great for disguising tastes. Just make sure your child drinks the full amount.

Smoothies can also do the trick. Not only does colder food or drink hide tastes better, but smoothies are a great vitamin booster as well.

### **Give Them Choices**

Although children aren't free to decide whether or not to take their medicine, parents can present them with choices that will help them feel more in control of what otherwise is being forced upon them. For example, if they have a liquid medication, do they want to receive it through a small medicine cup or a syringe? If it's a pill or capsule they're taking, do they want to wash it down with water or juice?

You can also allow your kid to have input on the scheduling of the medication: *Before or after bath time? Do you want to play a game before or after?*

Does the medicine come in different forms? Your kid might have difficulty swallowing a pill but doesn't have any issues with a chewable or liquid medication. Does your child have a favorite flavor? Some pharmacies can add flavoring to the medicine when requested upon pick-up.

Letting your child decide how they want to take the medication might be all it takes to get them to take their medicine.

### **Teach Your Children Well**

Kids are smarter than we give them credit for. Take the time to explain to them why certain medications are necessary (especially if you have a literal thinking child). They may be more inclined to take the medicine once they understand the effect it will have.

Explain to your children how the medicine works. The medication filters through their body and goes to the places that need care or healing. Antibiotics work to heal infections, so our bodies are better equipped to fight harmful bacteria.

If your child is old enough, consider teaching them how to swallow pills. The thought of swallowing a pill can be intimidating, but if you explain that most pills have no taste (if swallowed quickly), a child might want that option.

The transition from liquid medication to pills can raise another set of obstacles for kids, primarily their reluctance to attempt an effective swallow to get the tablet to go down. A fear of choking can be one hurdle, along with the strange new sensation of the tablet on the tongue. You can have the child practice with smaller-sized candy, and then build up to something that approximates the size of the pill.

For example, if your child needs to take a pill that's the size of a Skittle, then you would start with something smaller, like a Tic-Tac or a mini-M&Ms, and then work your way up to regular-sized M&Ms, and Skittles, all the way to Mike and Ike's, which are about the size of a standard tablet.

This, of course, will make pill-swallowing practice a popular segment of your kid's day, in addition to making your child more at ease about advancing on to swallowing medication. It gives them practice on something that is safe to still swallow and then builds their comfort level.

## **STAY POSITIVE!!**

The time has come to take the medicine. Relax—an anxious/frustrated adult begets an anxious/frustrated child. Unfortunately, if YOU approach the situation with a grimace, your child will see/sense that and be more hesitant. Approach with a positive attitude but remain firm that medicines must be taken.

Being positive about how much better they will feel after they take the medicine could really help soften the blow of something that tastes yucky. Explain that while medicine may not taste very good for just a couple of seconds, it will make them begin to feel better and then they won't have to take it anymore.

## **The Last Dose . . .**

Kids have to take medicine when it is warranted. If all else fails and the child has to have medicine, you may have to restrain them, and that can be hard on both the child and the parent.

Remember, there's a difference between allergy meds they could live without or life-saving antibiotics they need. Pick your battles if nothing else works. Some medicine is non-negotiable. It has to be done, and there are ways to make it more pleasant. However, if they refuse, you'll have to stay strong.

If you have tried all of the above measures and you are still having trouble with your child's medication, then call our office or make an appointment. We are happy to offer further suggestions and will help in any way that we can.