

Learning to Swallow Pills

Learning to swallow pills is hard for many people. In fact, studies show that **26%** of children have a hard time swallowing pills. Taking pills instead of liquid medication has its benefits: they are easier to carry with you and leave little or no medication taste in your mouth.

These tips can help in teaching your child how to swallow pills. **Please check in with your pharmacist to make sure these can work for your child's medication.**

Tips for making pill swallowing easier

- Put the pill in a spoonful of Jello or pudding, which will help it slide down your child's throat. Have your child practice swallowing a spoonful of the food without the medication first. Do not hide the pill in the food as this can break trust between you and your child.
- Coat the pill with Magic Shell—there are many flavors available.
- Place crushed pills in cherry (or other flavored) syrup or gel caps. Check with your pharmacist to see if the pill can be crushed.
- Give your child choices when possible: "Would you like to stand or sit?," "What would you like it mixed with?"
- Have your child keep their tongue flat when taking the pill.
- Dip the gel cap in ice water before swallowing to make it very slippery or use Pill Glide Swallowing Spray.
- Use a special pill swallowing cup (Oralflo; www.oralflo.com).



Head positions to make swallowing easier

- Try different head positions.
- Turning to the side relaxes the throat, which can make it easier for pills to slide down.



Teaching Kids to Swallow Pills Using the Candy Method

Throughout the process, provide a lot of praise (clapping, “Great job!”). For older children, have them say “I can do this,” “I will be okay,” or “My body can handle this.” Any step forward helps increase the likelihood that they will swallow pills in the future. You can always go back a step if needed.

Supplies needed for teaching your child how to swallow pills

- Small paper cups (to make sure there is not too much liquid)
- Different candies of increasing sizes (*cupcake sprinkles, Nerds®, TicTacs®, mini M&M's®, regular M&M's®, Good 'N Plenty®*)
- Empty pill gel capsules (if possible, ask your pharmacist)



Steps for swallowing pills

STEP 1 | Have your child picture their throat like it's a water slide.

- With some liquid or food, the pill will easily slide down! Remember, pills are designed for swallowing without causing choking.

STEP 2 | Ask your child to swallow a sip of water/juice (no carbonated beverages).

- Please make sure not to let your child swish the water in their mouth.

STEP 3 | Starting with the smallest candy, place the candy towards the back of your child's tongue and let it dissolve.

STEP 4 | Place the smallest candy on the back of their tongue and then ask your child to take a sip of water and swallow the candy. Repeat this 2–3 times so the child feels successful before going to **STEP 5**.

- It may take multiple drinks/tries to get the candy to go down so don't give up after the first attempt.

STEP 5 | Once successful with **STEPS 2–4**, move on to the next candy size and repeat until you reach the size of the pill.

If your child reaches a candy size they cannot swallow, return to the last size that they successfully swallowed so they can end the session with success. Each session should last about 5–10 minutes and should be fun.

Practice these steps every day until the child is comfortable swallowing pills. This may take a few weeks.

Need more help?

If your child is still having problems with swallowing pills, contact: _____

at _____ for additional help.