



How to Give Medicine to Children

Do You Know How To Give Medicine To Children?

If you are caring for a child who needs medicine, it's important that you know how to give the medicine the right way.

Over-the-Counter Drugs

Over-the-counter drugs are also called OTC drugs. They are medications you can buy without a doctor's prescription. You usually find them on drugstore shelves, or in supermarkets and other stores. OTC drugs have information on the bottle or box. Always read this information before using the medicine. This information tells you:

- how much to give
- how often to give it
- what is in the medication
- warnings about using the drug
- if the drug is safe for children. If no dose is given on the bottle or package for children under 12 years old, ask your doctor or pharmacist:
 - Is it OK to give the medicine to my child?
 - How much should I give my child and when?

If the medicine has alcohol in it, as some cough and cold syrups do, you may want to ask the doctor if it's OK for your child to take it.

Before buying the product, make sure the safety seal is not broken. If it's broken or torn, buy another box or bottle with an unbroken seal. Show the product with the broken seal to the pharmacist or sales person.

If your child has a cold, flu, or chickenpox, do not give your child any product with aspirin or similar drugs called salicylates unless your doctor tells you to. Aspirin and other salicylates given to children with symptoms of cold, flu, or chickenpox can cause a rare but sometimes deadly condition called Reye syndrome. Instead of aspirin or other salicylates, you can give your child acetaminophen (sold as Tylenol, Datril, and other brands).

When The Doctor Prescribes The Medicine

If a doctor prescribes a drug for your child, before you leave the doctor's office ask any questions you have about the drug. Some of these questions may be:

- What is the drug and what is it for?
- Will this drug cause a problem with other drugs my child is taking?
- How often does my child need to take this medicine?
- How many days or weeks does my child need to take this medicine?
- What if I miss giving my child a dose?
- How soon will the drug start working?
- What side effects does it have?
- What should I do if my child gets any of these side effects?
- Should I stop giving the medicine when my child gets better?

- Is there a less expensive generic version that I can use?

When you get the medicine, check to see if it's the color and size you expected from the doctor's description. If not, ask the pharmacist about it. When filling a prescription, the pharmacist will often give you printed information with the medicine. If you don't understand the information, or if you have questions, ask the pharmacist. If you still have questions, call your doctor.

How To Measure

Liquid medicines usually come with a cup, spoon, or syringe to help measure the right dose. Be sure to use it. The devices that come with the medicine are better for measuring than kitchen spoons because the amount of medicine kitchen spoons hold can differ a lot. For example, one kitchen teaspoon could hold nearly twice as much as another.

The numbers on the side of measuring instruments are usually small, so read them carefully. Here are the most common types of dosing instruments and tips for using them:

Dosage cups

For children who can drink from a cup without spilling. Look closely at the numbers on the side to make sure you get the dose right. Measure out the liquid with the cup at eye level on a flat surface.

Cylindrical dosing spoons

For children who can drink from a cup but are likely to spill. The spoon looks like a wide straw with a small spoon at the top. Measure the liquid in the spoon at eye level. Have the child sip the medicine from the spoon.

Droppers

For children who can't drink from a cup. Put the medicine into the dropper and measure at eye level. Give to the child quickly before the medicine drips out.

Syringes

For children who can't drink from a cup. You can squirt the medicine into the back of the child's mouth where it's less likely to spill out. Some syringes come with caps to prevent the medicine from leaking out. Be sure to remove these caps before giving the medicine to the child, or the child could choke on the cap. Throw away the cap or place it out of reach of children. You can fill a syringe with the right dose and leave it capped for a babysitter to give to your child later. Make sure you tell the sitter to remove the cap before giving the medicine to your child. It's best to use syringes specially made to give medicines to children. But if you find you have to use a hypodermic syringe, always remove the needle first.

Do You Have More Questions?

If you're not sure about the medicine or how to give it to your child, ask your pharmacist or doctor. Or ask the FDA.

The FDA may have an office near you. Look for the number in the blue pages of your phone book. You can also call the FDA on its toll-free number: (888) INFO-FDA (463-6332).

Or you can find the FDA on the Internet at www.fda.gov

The Food and Drug Administration is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that makes sure that medicines given to children work and are safe.

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