



Can't swallow
tablets?



Don't suffer
in silence.

Ask about liquid solutions



Practical solutions to making your medicines more effective.

If you struggle to swallow tablets or capsules you're not alone. In fact you're in good company as a recent survey showed that around 60% of people over 60 sometimes struggle to swallow solid medicines¹.

This leaflet is designed to give you more information about what to do if you ever find your medicine hard to swallow.

Who has difficulties swallowing tablets?

There are lots of reasons why people have difficulties swallowing tablets. Some just don't like taking tablets or capsules. Others have a medical condition, which makes it hard to swallow solid medicines. Sometimes just getting a bit older means that swallowing tablets becomes more difficult.

Whatever the cause, there are plenty of alternatives available and there's no need to suffer in silence.

Diagnosing swallowing problems

If any of the following statements apply to you, tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse and they can recommend a suitable alternative that you will find easier to take:

- I sometimes find it hard to swallow tablets or capsules

- I sometimes need to crush tablets or open capsules to make them easier to swallow
- I sometimes suck or chew my tablets or capsules before I can swallow them
- I sometimes have to crush a tablet or empty the contents of a capsule and mix it with food or drink to make it easier to swallow
- I sometimes miss taking my medication because I can't face trying to swallow it

What causes tablet-swallowing problems?

There's no single cause, but any of the following may mean it's harder to swallow tablets:

After a **stroke** many people have swallowing difficulties, which can last for many months or even years.

Getting **older** tends to lead to a drier mouth, which affects swallowing.

People with **Parkinson's disease** or **Alzheimer's disease** may find their ability to swallow tablets is affected.

Cancer of the mouth or throat may make swallowing solid medicines difficult.

Some commonly prescribed **medicines** can cause the mouth to become very dry, which will make it tricky to swallow tablets.

Should I crush tablets to make them easier to take?

Some people with swallowing difficulties might still be being prescribed solid medicines and are then resorting to crushing the tablets to make them easier to take.

Never crush tablets or open capsules unless you have checked with your Pharmacist to make sure it is safe to do so.

Some tablets have special coatings, which are destroyed by crushing, and you can't tell just by looking at the tablet or capsule if it's safe to tamper with.



What sort of tablets can't be crushed?

Tablets can be 'sugar coated', 'film coated', 'enteric coated' or coated to modify how the medicine is released into the body. Each of these coatings is there for a different reason.

A sugar coating or a film coating surrounds the tablet to make it taste better. Crushing these tablets may not seriously affect how the tablet works but may cause it to taste very unpleasant.





If a tablet has an 'enteric coating', it should never be crushed before being taken. The coating is designed to hold the tablet together in the stomach, which could be to:

- Protect the stomach from the medicine
- Protect the medicine from the stomach
- Release the medicine after the stomach
e.g. in the intestines

'Modified release' means the medicine inside the tablet has been modified so it is released slowly and doesn't have to be taken so often. Also the amount of medicine in the body increases slowly and reduces the chance of side effects. Modified release tablets should never be crushed before being taken. If they are crushed, the whole medicine dose is released very quickly and could be harmful.

What should I do if I'm having problems swallowing my medication?

First of all never tamper with your tablets or capsules to make them easier to swallow without getting medical advice first.

Secondly, most solid medicines are available as liquids, which are usually easier to take.

Make sure you tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist that you are having a problem and they will be able to advise on a suitable alternative for you.

'Above all else don't suffer in silence.'





Further Information

www.swallowingdifficulties.com

Includes information to help patients and health care professionals check if there are suitable alternatives to solid medication.

Pharmacy/surgery stamp

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Reference:

I. Strachan I, Greener M. Mediation related swallowing difficulties may be more common than we realise. *Pharmacy in Practice*, December 2005

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