

# Simple steps that make children's medicines easier to swallow

a

b

c



## Helping children take their medicine

**Mr Stephen Tomlin**

Paediatric Pharmacist Specialist

**Dr David Wright**

Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy Practice

# A simple guide to your child's medicine, that makes it easier to swallow

Always ask your Doctor, Pharmacist or Nurse about medicines for your child if you have any concerns

It is important for children to take their medicine if they are ill to help them get better, even if they don't like taking it



Older children may be ok with tablets or capsules but if the pills are too big ask your Pharmacist or Doctor for a liquid version



Some medicines are designed for adults so children often need smaller amounts. It is easier to adjust the amount of medicine for children if it is in liquid form



Do not mix medicines with food or drink to make it easier to take. It can change the way the medicine works



Do not crush tablets or capsules to make them easier to take without asking your pharmacist first



# A guide to children's medicine that's as easy as 1, 2, 3

## My child doesn't like taking medicine. What should I do?

Taking medicine is often an essential part of a child's treatment, whether it is bought from a pharmacy or prescribed by a doctor. It isn't always easy to get children to take their medicine and this leaflet has been written to help you help your child take their medicine.



### 1 At what age will my child be able to swallow a tablet or capsule?

There is no set age at which a child is both willing and able to swallow a solid tablet or capsule. Tablets usually have little taste and therefore older children may prefer them so long as they are not too large to swallow and are available in the correct dose for your child. Children often find that capsules or capsule shaped tablets are easiest to swallow. If your child, of any age, prefers a liquid medicine or is struggling to swallow tablets, just tell your doctor or pharmacist.

### 2 Is a liquid medicine more appropriate for a child?

It does depend on the particular child, but generally a younger child is more likely to prefer a liquid to a solid medicine. Liquid medicines may come in different flavours and are easy to swallow. Because children are much smaller than adults, a tablet designed for an adult may contain too much of the active ingredient for your child. A liquid can provide a wide range of doses just by changing the volume your child takes. So usually your pharmacist will recommend or your doctor will prescribe a liquid rather than a solid medicine for your child. If this doesn't happen and you feel a liquid is more suitable, then don't be afraid to ask.

### 3 My child used to take a liquid medicine and now refuses to take it.

Children's tastes do change with age. Just ask your pharmacist for advice about suitable alternative medicines. Never mix the medicine with anything else unless your pharmacist has recommended this. Some food and drinks can interact with your child's medicine, so always seek advice from a healthcare professional.

### 4 Can I crush my child's medicine to make it easier to give?

Many tablets and capsules have a special coating which may be there to:

- Help the medicine be released more slowly
- Protect the stomach from irritation from the medicine
- Protect the medicine from being broken down too quickly
- Help the tablet taste better

You can't tell just by looking at a tablet whether or not it has this special coating.

If you crush a tablet or open a capsule this could release the medicine too quickly, cause harm to the stomach or lead to the medicine not working properly.

Below is a picture of what may happen to the medicine in the body when it is released from a solid tablet and what may happen when a tablet has been crushed.

Always seek advice from your doctor or pharmacist before crushing tablets or opening capsules. Many solid medicines are also available as liquids.

### 5 My doctor has told me that my child's prescribed medicine is not licensed, what does this mean?

Most medicines in the UK have a Product Licence which states what condition the medicine can be used for and in what type of patient. To get a licence, a medicine has to be tested in clinical trials.

Off-label prescribing is when a medicine is used for illnesses or patients not covered by the original licence. For example, the patients in the clinical trial may have been adults but doctors may find that the medicine works well for children too. So off-label prescribing is when doctors use medicines for illnesses or ages that are not written in the Product Licence.

Some medicines do not have a licence at all and are known as "unlicensed" medicines. These may be liquid medicines that children can take more easily than a solid tablet or medicines in a special dose or formulation. Unlicensed medicines may be made up by the pharmacist or supplied as "Specials" by expert medicines manufacturers.

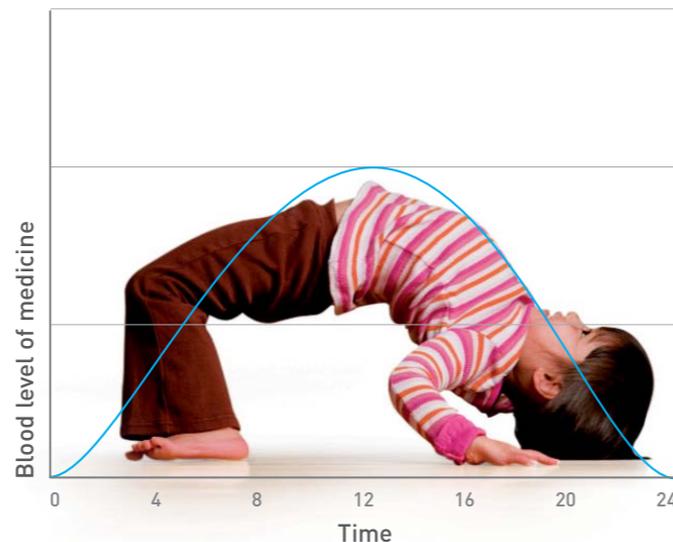
If you are at all worried, talk to your pharmacist.

### 6 My child is about to be discharged from hospital what happens about the medicine?

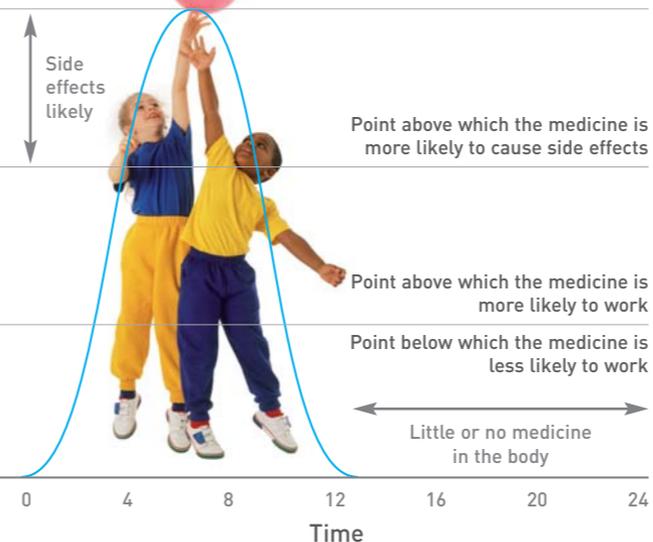
When your child is discharged from hospital, it is very important that they receive exactly the same medicines prescribed by the hospital when they come home. The name, dosing format and the manufacturer of the medicine should all remain the same.

For example if your child had a liquid medicine in hospital, exactly the same liquid should be prescribed by your doctor and supplied from the same source as in hospital. This is very important, as altering the medicine could change the beneficial effects it has for your child. The hospital will write to your doctor explaining precisely what medicines your child should be receiving. If you have any doubts or concerns do talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

#### Intact tablet



#### Crushed tablet





[www.swallowingdifficulties.com](http://www.swallowingdifficulties.com)



Produced in partnership with  
School and Public Health  
Nurses Association (SAPHNA)

Supported by an  
educational grant from  
Rosemont Pharmaceuticals

**Rosemont™**  
The source of liquid solutions.

PT1004