

Teaching Kids How to Swallow Pills



Learning how to swallow pills is hard for many adults and children. In fact, studies show that **26%** of children have a hard time swallowing pills. The benefits of swallowing pills can be: convenience for parents and adolescents (e.g., can carry them with you, does not need to be refrigerated), less concern with medication taste, and pills may be more effective than liquids or sprinkles. These tips and tricks can **make learning how to swallow pills easier**.

Things you should have on hand before learning to swallow pills:

- Small Dixie® cups or equivalent
- Candies of different increasing sizes (cupcake sprinkles, Nerds®, mini M&M's®, regular M&M's®, Good "N Plenty®)
- Empty pill gel capsules (if possible-ask your pharmacist)

STEP 1: Ask the child to swallow a sip of water and then praise the child (e.g., "Sally-you did a great job swallowing the water"). Please make sure not to let your child swish the water in their mouth.

STEP 2: Starting with the smallest candy, place the candy towards the back of the tongue and let it dissolve.

STEP 3: Place the smallest candy on the tongue and then take a sip of water and swallow the candy.

STEP 4: Once successful with steps 1-3, move on to the next candy size. This does not all have to happen at one time. It may take a few days or weeks for the child to build up their confidence. Each session should last about 5-10 minutes and should be fun.

NOTE: It is important to provide a lot of praise for your child throughout the process. Any step forward helps increase the likelihood that they will swallow pills in the future. You can always go back a step if needed.

STEP 5: Once the child successfully swallows the candy sizes (you should aim for the last candy size being similar in size to the pill), they can try an empty capsule, if possible, or the actual pill. You may also try to cut or chop the pill in halves/quarters (check with pharmacist if this is okay) first.

If the child has difficulty swallowing, here are some fun tips:

- Insert the pill in a spoonful of Jello® or pudding and let it slide down your child's throat. Have your child practice swallowing spoonfuls of the food without the medicine first.
- Dip the gel cap in ice water before swallowing to make the coating very slippery.
- Coat the pill with Magic Shell®. Pills should be placed in the freezer for 30 minutes before using them.
- Tear off a piece of Fruit Roll-Ups® or melt Starburst® candy in the microwave for 10-15 seconds to wrap around the pill prior to swallowing.
- Place pill or crushed pill in gel caps. This covering minimizes the bitter taste from the coating of the pill. Gel caps come in a variety of sizes; ask your physician or pharmacist for gel caps if you do not have them.