Learning to Swallow Pills

Learning to swallow pills can be hard for everyone – from children to older adults. Studies show that about **30% - 50% of children and adolescents** have a hard time swallowing pills. Taking pills instead of liquid medicine has benefits. They are easier to carry with you and don’t leave a bad taste of medicine in your mouth.

These tips can help you learn or teach your child how to swallow pills. **Please check with your pharmacist to make sure these can work for the type of medicine you take.**

**Tips for Making Pill Swallowing Easier**

- **Put the pill in a spoonful of Jello® or pudding.** This will help it slide down your (your child’s) throat. Have the person practice swallowing a spoonful of the food without the medicine first. **Caregivers:** Do not hide the pill in the food as this can break trust between you and your child/teen.

- **Use Hershey’s Magic Shell® ice cream topping to coat the pill.** Put the Magic Shell® on the pill and put it in the freezer for a minute. It should be cold and taste like chocolate.

- **Check with your pharmacist to make sure your pills can be crushed.** If so, place the crushed pills in cherry flavored syrup (or other flavor) or gel caps.

- **Give your child choices when possible:** “Would you like to stand or sit?” “What would you like it mixed with?”

- **Have the child/adult 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 helps the throat relax, which can make it easier for pills to slide down.**

**Videos that May be Helpful**

- **Learn from another teen!**
  
Steps for Swallowing Pills

**STEP 1:** Have the person picture their throat like it’s a water slide.
- With some liquid or food, the pill will easily slide down! Remember, pills are made for swallowing without causing choking.

**STEP 2:** Ask the person to swallow a sip of water/juice (no carbonated or alcoholic 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 their tongue and let it dissolve.

**STEP 4:** Place the smallest candy on the back of their tongue and then ask them to take a sip of water and swallow the candy. Repeat this 2-3 times so the person feels successful before going to step 5.
- It may take many drinks/tries to get the candy to go down so do not give up after the first attempt.

**STEP 5:** Once a person can do steps 2-4, move on to the next candy size and repeat until you reach the size of the pill.

If your child/teen/adult reaches a candy size they cannot swallow, go back 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 person feels okay swallowing pills. This may take a few weeks.

If the person is still having problems swallowing pills, contact (doctor or nurse)__________________ at ______________________ for more help.

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