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## How can I help my child learn to swallow pills?

The easiest way to learn how to swallow pills is to practice swallowing with small candies, like mini chocolates or sprinkles. You can find these candies in the baking or candy aisle of most grocery stores. The goal is to slowly increase the size of candy. Buy many sizes ranging from small sprinkles to a candy that is close to the size of pill your child needs to swallow.

## What supplies will I need?

- Small cup to hold candies
- Water or something to drink
- Candies of different sizes, such as sprinkles, Nerds, M&M'S Minis, M&M'S and Good & Plenty
- Empty gel capsules if you cannot use candies

## What should I know before we start?

Spend about 5 to 10 minutes each time you practice. Make it fun for your child. Try to end each practice after your child can swallow a candy. You may have to go back to a smaller size if needed.

- It may help your child to turn their head from side to side with their chin tilted up while they swallow.
- Gagging is common when learning to swallow pills.
- Tell your child it is OK to feel upset or stressed. It helps to take a break and go at your child's pace. You can go back to a smaller sized candy to help your child feel more confident.
- It is important to tell your child they are doing a good job as they practice. Any progress helps increase the chance that they will learn to swallow pills.

## What are the steps?

**Step 1:** Have your child practice swallowing just a sip of water in different positions, such as:

- Head facing forward.
- Chin tilted down or up.
- Head turned slightly to the right or left.

Ask your child which position is most comfortable. Make sure they are swallowing quickly and not moving water around in their mouth.

**Step 2:** Place the smallest candy on your child's tongue. Ask them to take a small sip of water and swallow the candy using the head position that was most comfortable for them. Try other head positions as needed. Praise and encourage your child each time they try.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Learning how to swallow pills, continued

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**Step 3:** Repeat steps 1 and 2 with the next candy size after your child can swallow the smallest candy. Some children may move quickly to the next size. Others may take days or weeks.

**Step 4:** When your child can swallow the candy that is most like the size of their pill, encourage your child to try to swallow an empty capsule or the actual pill.

## Extra tips and tricks

Always talk with your child's doctor or pharmacist before using these tips when giving medicines. Contact a member of your child's care team for more information.

- Place the pill on your child's tongue. Have them take 3 gulps of water using a straw. Your child should swallow the pill as they swallow the water.
- Try giving pills with a thick liquid, such as a smoothie or milkshake.
- Put the pill in a spoonful of Jell-O, pudding, apple sauce or peanut butter. Encourage your child to swallow like normal.
- Dip the gel cap in ice water to make the coating slippery before swallowing.
- Coat the pill with a chocolate hard covering like Magic Shell. Put the pill in the freezer for 30 minutes before swallowing it.
- Try different body positions.
  - Some children like standing instead of sitting.
  - Other children may want to face away from you.
  - Capsules are lighter than tablets and tend to float forward in the mouth when swallowing. Have your child lean their head slightly forward to move the capsule towards the back of the mouth.
- Wrap the pill in soft candy, such as a piece of Fruit Roll-Ups, Airheads or Starburst.
- Place an ice cube in your child's mouth to dull their taste. Then have them spit out the ice before swallowing the pill.
- Use gel capsules. Put the pill, cut or crushed, in a gel capsule.
  - This may help with the bad taste from the coating of the pill.
  - Gel capsules come in different sizes. Ask your child's care team for gel capsules if you do not have them.
- There are helpful videos for pill swallowing. One option is "How to Take a Pill: Teaching Kids How to Take Medication" on YouTube. Ask the care team for more resources.

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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