



Giving your child medicines

Every child will need to take medicine at some point during childhood but we know from talking to parents that this can be a worry at times. This information sheet explains about how best to give medicines to children.

Have a positive attitude

If you are worried about your child having to take medicines, this often passes to your child who also becomes anxious. Although it is hard, try to stay positive. Also, have a set time for trying to give your child medicines. Most of the time, you have a 'window' of time for giving the medicine, so there will be no harm in leaving it for an hour if your child is upset. It may be easier if your child has been distracted by something fun for a while beforehand.

We make it fun as they pick up on negative vibes and emotions, which is remembered the next time and the whole experience is very painful for both parent and child.

[Mum of a 7 year old]

Involve the whole family if possible

You can use sibling rivalry to good effect sometimes. If your other children are also taking medicines, try to arrange it (if possible) so that they all take medicines together. If you prefer, you could try

to give teddy or a favourite toy some medicine before giving it to your child.

It is amazing how when a sibling takes a tablet, so can the patient!

[Mum of two children aged 5 and 8]

Be honest

Explain to your child that the medicine is to help them feel better. If it is likely to be a long-term medicine, tell your child. If you know how the medicine works, it can help to explain it. For instance, some parents explain that antibiotics hurt germs and fight off infection.

Tell them it's to make their head or tummy etc. better

[Mum of one child aged 2¼ years]

Incentives

You do not have to rely on the old adage that 'a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down'. Other incentives work just as well with no risk to your child's teeth. Many parents have used star charts with success. For instance, if a child takes



his or her medicine without a fuss, they get a star on their star chart. When they have built up a certain number of stars, they are allowed to choose a reward. It is important to be consistent with star charts and also to make sure the reward is small enough to be repeated if your child continues to do well.

My daughter needed 10 eye drops a day and each time she had one without crying or moaning, she got a star... When the chart was full, she chose a hamster. As the chart filled up, she almost started looking forward to her medication.

[Mum of two children aged 5 and 8]

Empower your child

If your child is having complex treatment, he or she may not feel in control any more. One way of giving a little bit of control back to your child can be through his or her medicines. There is rarely a choice in whether to take the medicines or not, but you could offer your child a choice of drink afterwards, an incentive as above or how to take the medicines.

I allowed my daughter to choose where she had her medicine (eye drops) – sometimes it was under the duvet, at other times it was in the bath, but at least she felt in control.

[Mum of two children aged 5 and 8]

Masking

When you collect your child's medicines from the pharmacy, ask whether they can be mixed with a drink or food. If tablets can be crushed, they can be mixed with a spoonful of yoghurt. Generally, crushing a tablet and adding it to a drink tends not to work very well as the bits can get left at the bottom of the cup. It is more reliable to mix the crushed tablet with a small amount of liquid and draw it up in an oral syringe. Another idea is to give a strong tasting drink afterwards.

Give the child apple juice or strong tasting squash to wash down the 'horrible flavour'

[Mum of two children aged 6 and 9 years old]

Ask advice

If you are having trouble giving medicines to your child, ask someone for help. Your local pharmacist will be able to offer suggestions and the play specialists at GOSH have lots of experience in working with children around treatment.

Useful telephone numbers

Pharmacy Department:

020 7829 8680

Pharmacy Medicines Information:

020 7829 8608

Compiled by the Pharmacy department in collaboration with the Child and Family Information Group

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