



Giving your child medicines:

Types of medicines

Most medicines come in a various types or formats. Be aware, though, that some medicines (particularly rare or unusual ones) only come in one type. Also, some may be more effective in one type than another. Please see our other information sheets on how to give different types of medicines.

In the UK, medicines often come in some of the following preparations:

- **Liquid** – the active part of the medicine is combined with a liquid to make it easier to take or better absorbed. A liquid may also be called a 'mixture', 'solution' or 'syrup'. Many common liquids are now available without any added colouring or sugar.
- **Tablet** – the active ingredient is combined with another substance and pressed into a round or oval solid shape. There are different types of tablet. Soluble or dispersible tablets can safely be dissolved in water.
- **Capsules** – the active part of the medicine is contained inside a plastic shell that dissolves slowly in the stomach. Some capsules can be taken apart so the contents can be mixed with a favourite food. Others need to be swallowed whole so the medicine is not absorbed until the stomach acid breaks down the capsule shell.

Other types of medicine include the following:

- **Topical medicines** – these are creams, lotions or ointments that are applied directly onto the skin. They come in tubs, bottles or tubes depending on the type of medicine. The active part of the medicine is mixed with another substance that makes it easy to apply to the skin.
- **Suppositories** – the active part of the medicine is combined with another substance and pressed into a 'bullet shape' so it can be inserted into the rectum (back passage). Suppositories must not be swallowed.
- **Drops** – these are often used where the active part of the medicine works best if it reaches the affected area directly. They tend to be used for eye, ear or nose.
- **Inhalers** – the active part of the medicine is released under pressure directly into the lungs. Young children may need to use a 'spacer' device to take the medicine properly. Inhalers can be difficult to use at first so your pharmacist will show you how to give them.



- **Injections** – there are various types of injection, differing in how and where it is injected. Subcutaneous or SC injections are given just under the surface of the skin. Intramuscular or IM injections are given into a muscle. Intrathecal injections are given into the fluid around the spinal cord. Intravenous or IV injections are given into a vein. Some injections can be given at home but most are given at your doctor's surgery (GP) or in hospital.
- **Implants or patches** – some medicines are absorbed by the body through the skin, such as nicotine patches for help in giving up smoking or contraceptive implants.
- **Buccal or sublingual tablets or liquids** – these look similar to normal tablets or liquids but they are not swallowed. Buccal medicines are held in the cheek so that the mouth lining absorbs the active ingredient. Sublingual medicines work in the same way but are put underneath the tongue. Buccal and sublingual medicines tend only to be given in very specific circumstances.

Useful telephone numbers

GOS switchboard: 020 7405 9200

**Pharmacy Medicines Information:
020 7829 8608 Monday to Friday
from 9am to 5pm**

Final words

When your doctor is prescribing medicine, remember to ask about the different formats available. If you know from experience that your child prefers tablets to liquids, please tell your doctor. Wherever possible, he or she will prescribe the medicine in a format that makes it easier for your child to take it. You can also discuss this with your pharmacist when you hand in the prescription.

Notes

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

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust
Great Ormond Street
London WC1N 3JH

www.goshfamilies.nhs.uk www.childrenfirst.nhs.uk