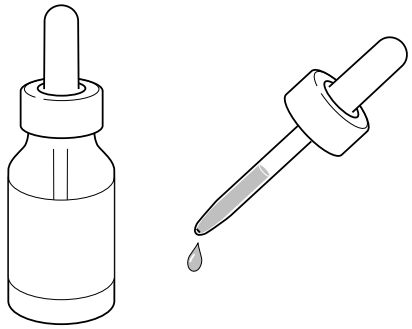
Let's Talk About...

Medicine, how to give

There are many ways to give medicine: as a chewable tablet, capsule, rectal suppository or a liquid (with a dropper, syringe, nipple, medicine cup, or teaspoon). This handout tells you the most common ways to give your child medicine. If this handout does not have the method you are supposed to use, call your child's doctor's office.

Be sure you always follow the directions on the medicine or the directions from your doctor or pharmacist. The amount of medicine to give your child (the dose) is usually listed in milligrams (abbreviated "mg"). Liquid medicine may be ordered in milliliters (abbreviated "mL") or in cubic centimeters (abbreviated "cc"). ML and cc are the same measurement with a different name. Mg and mL are not the same. It is important you do not confuse mg and mL. When you pick up a prescription for a liquid medicine, ask the pharmacist to show you the amount you should give on the syringe, cup or dropper. When you get home, if you are not sure how much medicine to give your child, call your child's doctor or pharmacist.

It is important to teach your children that people take medicine when they are sick so they will get well.

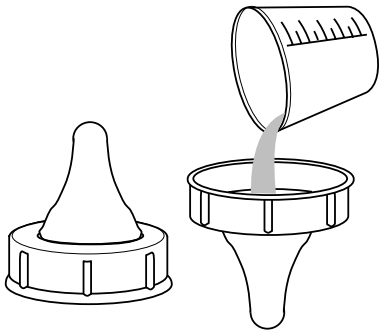


Medicine dropper

Droppers are mostly used for babies because babies cannot chew or swallow capsules. Usually, the medicine dropper comes with the bottle of liquid medicine. Droppers have a measuring line on them.

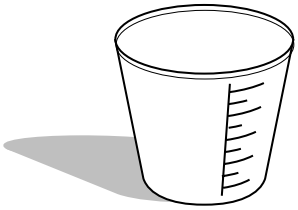
To use a dropper, first unscrew it and take it out of the medicine bottle. Squeeze the rubber top, put the dropper in the medicine, and let go of the rubber top to suck up the medicine to the right measuring line.

Do not give your baby medicine when she is lying down flat, because she could choke. Hold your baby in your lap, raise her head slightly, and rest her head against your body. Squirt the medicine in the side of her mouth (inside the cheek), and towards the back. It may help to squeeze both her cheeks slightly until she swallows the medicine. This will help keep her from spitting the medicine out.



Nipple

A nipple will probably work best when your baby is hungry. Measure the medicine with a plastic syringe or small measuring cup and put it into the nipple *(see illustration)*. Hold your baby like you normally do when feeding her from a bottle. Let her suck from the nipple. Make sure she sucks out all the medicine.

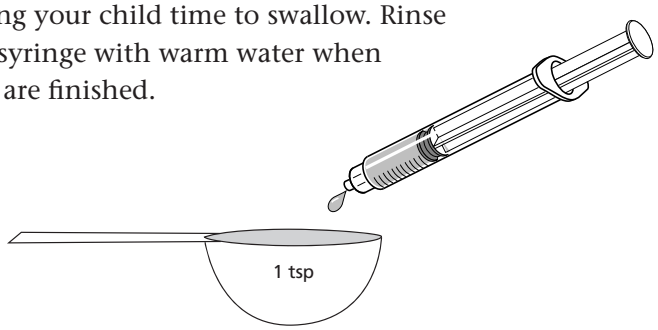


Medicine cup

A medicine cup is a small, plastic cup with measuring marks on the side. Use a medicine cup for your toddler or child if she normally drinks from a cup. Give the medicine slowly and allow your child to swallow between sips.

Syringe

You can use a plastic syringe, without a needle, to give liquid medicines to babies and toddlers. To use the syringe, first make sure it is clean. To rinse the syringe, pull warm water into the syringe by pulling back on the plunger. Then push the water out. Do this several times. Do not take the syringe apart. After the syringe is clean, push the plunger all the way down. Put the syringe tip in the medicine and pull the plunger until the medicine is at the level you want. Do not give your child medicine when she is lying down flat, because she could choke. Hold your baby in your lap, raise her head slightly, and rest her head against your body. Place the syringe to the side and the back of her mouth. Slowly push down the plunger on the syringe, giving your child time to swallow. Rinse the syringe with warm water when you are finished.



Teaspoon

Use a measuring spoon like the picture above. Do not use an ordinary spoon from your silverware. If the directions on the medicine says to use a teaspoon or tablespoon, ask your pharmacist to show you how much to give.

Capsules

Do not give your baby or toddler capsules. Make sure your child is old enough to know how to swallow capsules before using them.

Rectal medicines or suppositories

With babies, place your child on her stomach in your lap across your legs. Apply a tiny amount of Vaseline™ to the tip of the suppository. With toddlers and preschoolers, have your child lie on her side, facing you, when you insert the suppository. Show her the suppository and explain what you are doing. Gently push the pointed end of the suppository into your child's rectum one inch. After inserting it, hold her buttocks together for at least 5 minutes to prevent her from pushing the medicine out. Wash your hands well when you are finished.

Ear drops

Explain what you are doing, if she is old enough to understand. Have your child lie on her side, with the ear that needs the medicine facing up. Gently pull her outer ear down and toward the back of her head. Squeeze the dropper for the right number of drops. Make sure your child continues to lie on that side for 5-15 minutes, if possible. Let her know the medicine will help her, even though she might not like the drops. Tell her that by lying on her side, she lets the medicine work the best it can.

Chewable tablets

Do not give chewable tablets to your baby. Toddlers can chew tablets and then have a drink of water, juice, or milk. If your child will not chew and swallow tablets, you can crush the tablet and give it in fruit syrup, flavored yogurt, or applesauce. Before you give your child crushed tablets, check with your pharmacist to find out if crushing the tablet and mixing it with food or liquid will change how well the medicine works.

Ask your pharmacist for help with these or any other ways to take medicine. Your pharmacist is trained to teach and help you.

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