How to Help Children Take Medicine

Medicine taking habits start early in life. Certain stages of development can present new challenges for medicine taking. The following guidelines can be of assistance in facilitating positive medicine taking habits.

- **Your attitude about giving medicine and taking medicine is very important.**
  Be confident, encouraging, comforting, calm, and lovingly firm throughout the process. This will help the child feel the adult is in control and assist the child in developing positive emotions and habits around medication taking, which will help the child in taking future doses of medicine.
- **Allow ample time for medication administration. Be patient. Breathe deep and take breaks as needed.**
- **Avoid giving medicine in places where there are lots of people and/or noise.**
  Typically, only having one person work with the child to take medication is best.
  Avoid giving medicine in front of many other people.
- **Physically be on the child's level, not standing over or towering over the child.**
- **Be honest by telling the child, "this is medicine to help your body."**
  Start talking about it early on; children understand what is said long before they can speak.
  Explain in a way the child can understand the benefits. Ex: "This medicine will make your tummy not hurt". Listen to what the child says and if possible, modify the approach to meet the child's needs.
- **Let emotions happen, providing comfort before explanations.**
- **Validate any difficult emotions a child may have about taking medicines.**
  Hug your child and say, "I hear you do not want to take your medicine. I am here with you to help." Consider saying, "Taking your medicine is very important for your body to be healthy".
- **Demonstrate by giving stuffies medicine; this can be helpful for children in taking their medicine.**

- **Avoid asking the child to take the medicine when it is not optional.**
- **Tell them "it is time to take your medicine" or when reasonable. Provide them with a choice.**
  Ex: "Would you like to take your medicine before or after ___," if that is reasonable under the circumstances.
- **Use first-then language. Ex: "Take the medicine and then we will watch Bluey".**
  Be sure to do what you said you would do, even if the child struggled to take the medicine.
- **Avoid telling them it tastes gross or making faces of disgust.**
- **Offer an age-appropriate comfortable position.**
  Usually this is sitting up; people typically don't eat or drink lying down or reclined. Younger children will often take medicine better when in a loved one's lap.

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- **Do not cover child's nose or mouth and do not blow in their face to induce swallowing.**
- **Give medicine right before a meal or feeding time.**
  When infants and children are hungry, they are more likely to take medicine.
- **Infants typically take medicine best from an oral syringe.**
  Avoid prying open the mouth or squirting medicine into back of mouth as it may cause choking.
  Gently place oral syringe half way along inner cheek/side of tongue and gently squirt ½ to 1 ml of medicine in at a time.
  Allow children to swallow medicine before putting more in their mouth.
  Alternating sides of the mouth can be helpful.
- **Older children can be given the choice of taking the medicine from an oral syringe or medicine cup.**
  They do not have the choice to take the medicine or not, but giving them other realistic choices may help the child to cooperate.
- **When using an oral syringe for a child of any age, having a medicine cup in hand is recommended as it allows any medicine coming out of the mouth to be scooped up off the lips or chin and re-fed to the child.**
  If a child is holding medicine in their mouth for a long time gently stroke the neck from top (under chin) down if needed, as this can encourage swallowing.

- **Avoid mixing medicine into large quantities of food or drink; this may cause them to begin to dislike the foods and drinks they need.**
  Some medicines can be mixed with 1-2 teaspoons or 5-10mL of juice or food and given with a spoon.
- **Some families find success in allowing a child to eat part of a popsicle then take the medicine and finish the popsicle. The cold and syrup from the popsicle can lessen the intense taste of medicines.**
- **Drinking water or grape juice after taking medicine can be helpful for older children.**
- **Praise children for taking their medicines.**
  Some families find giving the child a small reward like a sticker after taking the medicine helpful.
- **Providing cuddles and hugs can be beneficial for all children before, during, and after taking medicine but is especially important for those who are upset.**
- **Be consistent.**
- **Avoid giving medicine right after disciplining your child as the child may think medicine is punishment.**
- **Do not threaten children if they are refusing to take medicine.**
- **Sometimes play, shows, etc. may need to be put on hold or turned off until the medicine is taken.**
  Explain to the child that taking their medicine is important and they cannot do anything else until it is taken.
- **Typically at age 6 years old, children may start to learn to swallow a small pill or capsule.**

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