



# Parent Tips

## Giving medicine

Taking medicine can be a battle, but if you are willing to be creative and give your child some control, it can be very quickly resolved. Here are some tips from parents.

*"For kids old enough to understand, explain why they need to take medicine. Explain how it will help them. Prepare them in advance. If there is a choice of flavors, let the child choose. Kids sometimes benefit from "medical play." Let the child practice giving medicine to a doll or stuffed animal."*

*"Over the course of two years, we had to try many different things to get Carlos to take his pills. He was only 2 1/2 at diagnosis so in the beginning we had to crush or dissolve all his pills. The steroids were always the hardest. At first we used applesauce and yogurt but after a while he started associating a bad taste with those foods so we switched to chocolate sauce and chocolate pudding. Then, as he grew older, we were able to get him to swallow the pills with the promise of a Hershey's kiss to follow."*

*"The troche was a dreaded part of the therapy. Someone suggested taking the troche with a mint. That helped a lot."*

*"Our daughter had a very difficult time swallowing the steroids. They taste awful and she had had very little experience with swallowing pills. We got gel cap covers for the bad tasting pills and this made taking them a lot easier. These gel caps come in different sizes and can be used for many of the medications."*

*"Our daughter at three and a half could not swallow the multitude of pills she needed daily. We tried everything: mixing crushed pills into peanut butter with chocolate sauce, stirring it into applesauce, hiding it in cake frosting (Always check about food/drug interaction before trying any new attempts.) She would do something for a week and then just stop. It was really tough. Our best solution came from one of the oncology nurses at the hospital. She dissolved the pills in a little bit of water, then sucked it up into a sterile syringe (needle removed of course) and we squirted it into the side of her cheek, and then followed with an M&M chaser. This has worked for over six months!"*

*"I give my 5-year-old son ice and have him suck on it for a bit before giving him his medicine. It helps numb his taste buds so the medicine goes down smoothly."*

*An ice pop also works well. Or you could put the medicine in the fridge. Some, like steroids, have a bitter edge and taste better cold."*

*"Melt down starburst fruit chewies in the microwave just enough to soften and place the crumbled pill in it and make it into a little ball of candy."*

*"We wrap everything in a fruit rollup."*

*"Jello jigglers. I'd make a pan of them, slice a small square, then make a small slit and stuff the little pill inside. Totally eliminates the aftertaste, and actually made her LOOK FORWARD to taking prednisone. The jello would slide down her throat, the pill would stay inside, and mom and child would smile at having to take "jiggler pills." Only trouble is, the siblings would all want jigglers too, so I'd make it in bulk so we all could have our fill of jigglers...."*

*"We crushed the pills and mixed them in jelly. He could pick out his favorite kind of jelly. Grape worked very well. This did not dissolve the crushed pills but covered any flavor and he was able to do this with just over a spoonful of jelly. This did get us through a tough time of oral meds."*

*"Crush the prednisone and mix it in a sweet fruit drink: fruit punch or Hawaiian Punch- the sweeter the better to mask the taste."*

*"Try putting the prednisone in some orange juice. My son was 18 months old and the prednisone was the only med he refused to take. A lot of times he would get so upset about having to take it that he threw it up and we had to start all over again."*

*"For us, it was blackberries. Yep, blackberries. Like everyone else, we had a real tough time and tried all the usual tricks. Nothing worked. One day about a month into treatment, we were eating blackberries. My daughter loves them. We were noticing how they are like little cups. Hmm, just the right size to hold a pill. In went a pill, and it worked like a charm. So for a few weeks I was always on the lookout for berries. When they became scarce, we moved on to apple-sauce and yogurt. No more problems!"*

*"One of the tricks we started using was to crush the meds. Mix them with a little water and syrup that is used to mix lattes and Italian ices. Works wonders!!"*

*"Our best disguise for pills is Motts apple berry sauce."*

*"Another approach to large doses of liquid meds is to have a big glass of coca cola ready. The child gets to have a swallow of coke first, then can drink at will after each pulse of the yucky stuff. Again, this enhances their feeling of control and coke serves as an excellent palate cleanser, partly because of its strong*

taste and because the carbonation helps to scour the medicine off their taste buds."

"I decided to try teaching pill swallowing to my son (he had just turned 5 a few weeks earlier) After 5 days of forcing down the prednisone, I decided WE couldn't live like that for 3 years. The floor nurse told me the older kids usually took their prednisone in gel caps, as even the coating on prednisone tablets leaves a nasty aftertaste. We ordered a bunch of size 03 gel caps. They also manufacture 2 sizes smaller. I might have gotten smaller ones if they had been in stock but the 03s ended up working fine. Now he can take 00 and even bigger (pretty gigantic.) This is pretty impressive for a kid without the oral motor coordination to spit out toothpaste after brushing his teeth."

"At first, I didn't tell him we were working on pill swallowing. I just bought a few kinds of candy he liked and also got some of those powder "Pixie Stix" which they happened to have in the hospital gift shop. After a bit of general candy play, I told him I had a game to play with him. He had to close his eyes, I would put a tiny touch of the Pixie Stix powder on his tongue, and he would try to guess what flavor it was without looking at the color. That was the end of lesson one. Several hours later, we played the candy game again. This time, after a while, I told him I had a way to trick him... I had filled a few of the gel caps in advance with his favorite Pixie Stix flavor. When he had his eyes closed, I gently dropped the pill on his tongue and told him to guess--when he couldn't taste it or anything, we talked about what a funny joke it was. I was careful not to suggest he might want to swallow it or that it was a pill or anything and he usually spit it out or occasionally opened it and poured it in his mouth. We did this a few more times, and end of lesson two for a while. Lesson 3 was similar, but at the end of this lesson, I told him to trick me with any color/flavor pixie stix gel cap he wanted (I had filled a few in advance). When he dropped one in my mouth, I very cheerfully swallowed it with a big drink of water and talked about how good it was and guessed all kinds of goofy flavors since I couldn't taste it. I bet him a dollar that he couldn't do that, too. After some gentle coaxing, he gave it a shot. He gagged a bit the first couple of times, but luckily the nurse came in about then and helped me challenge/encourage him to swallow a couple. (Again, we hadn't yet mentioned that this might be done with something other than candy). We made a huge deal of this, and had other nurses come in and view and applaud, etc.

Later that evening, the nurse dispensing meds suggested that since he hated the prednisone tablets smushed in juice so very very much, that she could put it in gel caps like the candy and he could swallow it without tasting it, just like the candy. It took a bit of coaxing, but he eventually agreed to try one if I would buy him a new Hot Wheels car. The rest is history . . . he found that even though he occasionally gagged, this was much much better than trying to take the prednisone other ways.

After a couple of months, we were able to gradually increase the gel cap size so that he didn't have to take so many pills every night. In the last month or so, I've been sneaking in the Bactrim, methotrexate, and the 6-MP without gel caps and he does fine. I still always put the prednisone in the gel cap, just in case."

*"This probably sounds weird, but when my son was diagnosed at the age of 3 1/2, we too had a very hard time with the prednisone. We decided to have him swallow the pills instead of crush them. We started out with the baby-sized m&m candies, and him swallowing them whole, to get him used to swallowing things without chewing. Then we bought some empty gel-caps, found at most healthfood stores and can be ordered through pharmacies, and started putting the prednisone tablets in them. Whole, not crushed. We could fit 5 5mg tablets into one gel-cap. It worked great. But the trick was to teach him how to just "swallow" without chewing. It took quite a few m&m's (he didn't mind, and he thought it was fun), but he finally got the hang of it and started swallowing without the gag, or puke!"*

*"My son was dx just days after his 4th birthday. It took several weeks of choking down crushed up pills and he would say, "this is gross mom". I went out and got all the small kinds of candies I could find and he started practicing swallowing them. "Nerds" candies were the ones. He's been the master of pill swallowing ever since. He now shows off and can swallow several pills at one time. It has definitely made a huge difference in his attitude and compliance, and made life much easier for me!"*

*"We did the gel caps thing too. We went to the health food store and bought our gel caps there. It was much cheaper than the pharmacy. And we practiced with M&M candies. I quit crushing the prednisone, and just dropped the pills into the gel cap. We can fit 6 methotrexate into one! The same for prednisone. When he was switched to decadron, we did not have the worry of the bitter taste anymore, so the empty gel caps were not needed, only a continence of not having to swallow so many pills."*

*"My son (aged 5) hated Pred so much, we suggested he try swallowing tablets instead, and he agreed to try because the GIRL in the cubicle next door took hers like that! With 2 sisters, he hates being outdone by women! It was a historic moment!"*

*"My son learned to swallow his pills too. The trick is not to lean head back -- lean forward if anything. He hates any liquid meds, so we do everything in a #4 capsule."*