

# Fact Sheet

News from the IBD Help Center

## I HAVE TO SWALLOW THAT?

### PILL SWALLOWING TECHNIQUES FOR KIDS AND TEENS

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are long-term diseases. This means that people with these conditions may need to take medication for the rest of their lives. While not every person with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis will be on medication all of the time, most people will require therapy most of the time. Sometimes kids, teens and adults have a hard time swallowing pills. We wrote this fact sheet to teach you some ways to help you swallow those pills.

Pill swallowing is a skill that you can learn. Some people learn this skill quickly, but some people have more difficulty. Like any other skill, this develops with practice.

#### **I have to swallow *that*?**

We know that swallowing pills can be as scary as having Crohn's or colitis itself, whether the pills are big or small. Think of your pill as your friend who will help you feel better, not something to be afraid of. Like any other skill that you learn, practicing will make you more confident! You CAN do it!

#### **Here are some ways to practice swallowing pills:**

- Start practicing with candy. Start with a tiny one, and after swallowing it two times, move on to bigger ones. If you can't swallow it two times, go back to a smaller one for more practice. Here are some candies to practice with, from smallest to largest:
  - Sprinkles (the kind that are put on cupcakes)
  - Nerds
  - Mini M & M's (smaller than the regular size M & M's)
  - Tic Tacs
  - Regular size M & M's and/or Skittles
  - Jelly Belly brand jelly beans (they're smaller than other brands)
  - Good & Plenty
- Use water that is room-temperature or a little warm
- Take a sip of water before and after swallowing to help the pill go down
- Try different ways of swallowing to see what works for you:

- Most people put the pill on the back of their tongue and drink water until the pill goes down their throat
- Some people like to put water in their mouth and then put the pills in with the water. They swallow that water and pill together.
- Another way is to try using a straw to drink the water
- Tilt your head back a little when you swallow, so it's easier to get to get the pill down. However...
  - Don't do this for capsules – they float on water! If you're swallowing this type of pill, tilt your head down a little so that it floats up to the back of your mouth.
- Also try looking straight ahead while swallowing instead of tilting your head. Everyone has their own unique way that helps them.

### Here are some other tips:

- Don't those pills smell like roses? To get rid of the smell and taste of your pills, slip the pill in ice cream, apple sauce, or another soft food, but do not crush or break the pills. They will not work as effectively.
- Some people are afraid they might choke on a pill. Open your mouth in front of a mirror and say “ahhhh,” like you do at the doctor's. See how big your throat is? Pills can go down easily.
- Some people don't like the feeling of the pill going down their throat. It's normal to feel the pill in your throat. If you don't like the way it feels, keep practicing and your throat will get used to that feeling. Taking a few sips of water after swallowing the pill helps get rid of this feeling, too.
- Relax. Take a deep breath and slowly let it out before you swallow a pill.
- Practice for only 20 – 30 minutes per day. End with a “success”: make sure you swallow the last pill of your practice session, even if you need to go back to a smaller size.

If you're still having trouble, you can work with a psychologist or another therapist who helps people learn how to manage their anxiety and swallow pills. Hypnotherapy or using a pill swallowing cup are other options that may help.

If you have trouble swallowing lots of things (not just pills), talk to your doctor. You may have a condition that makes it difficult or not possible to swallow.

### I feel ok! Do I still need to take my meds?

Do you ever feel like there is no need to take those pills when you're feeling okay? Well, look at it this way: That medication is the main reason you are feeling healthy, so continue on with that great attitude and take those pills!

### Tips for parents:

- For younger children, setting up a sticker chart can be helpful. Reward both the effort (give a reward for practicing 20 – 30 minutes without giving up) and reward the successes of swallowing pills.
- Provide enough time for swallowing the pills so the child/teen does not feel pressured.
- Ignore any negative behaviors.
- If your child whines or complains, don't say anything.

- Give lots of encouragement and praise when your child is trying to swallow pills. For example, “You’re doing a great job of trying!” “I know you can do it!”
- Help your child relax by taking a deep breath (and letting it out slowly) with them before attempting to swallow a pill.
- DO NOT crush or break the pill—the medication may not work as effectively.
- To disguise a bad taste or smell, it may be helpful to put the pill in ice cream, apple sauce, or another soft food.

## Final words on swallowing pills

Still having trouble swallowing those darn pills? Just remember:

- breathe deeply
- take your time
- visualize yourself being able to swallow it successfully

A majority of people are physically able to swallow pills, even though they are scared. Remember: practice makes perfect!

Find your own style. Maybe doing this alone will be best for you, or swallowing the pill with a favorite drink instead of water sometimes works too.

Visualize your pill as a favorite food. Also, think of it this way: Those pills you are stressing about are usually the size or even smaller of the food you easily swallow. So take a deep breath and GO FOR IT!

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