

# Fact Sheet

## News from the IBD Help Center

### **PILL SWALLOWING TECHNIQUES FOR KIDS AND TEENS**

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are long-term diseases, and people with these conditions may need to take medication for the rest of their lives. Children and teens become ready to swallow pills at different times and some may have a hard time. But the good news is that pill swallowing is a skill that anyone can learn, and like any other skill, it develops with practice.

#### **Here are some ways to help your child or teen practice swallowing pills:**

- You can help your child start practicing with candy. They can start with a tiny one, and after swallowing it two times, move on to bigger ones. If they 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
- It's best to use water that is room-temperature or a little warm
- To get rid of the smell and taste of the medication, slip the pill in a small spoonful of ice cream, apple sauce, or another soft food, but do not crush or break the pill as they will not work as effectively. Taking a sip of water or juice before and after swallowing can also help the pill go down. Remember to encourage your child to drink water throughout the day!
- Try different ways of swallowing to see what works best for them:
  - Putting the pill on the back of their tongue and drink water until the pill goes down their throat
  - Having them take a sip of water or juice first, and then put the pills in their mouth with the water. They can then swallow the water and pill together.
  - Using a straw to drink water can help the pill go down easier.
- Encourage your child or teen to tilt their head back a little when swallowing, so it's easier to get the pill down.
- Encourage them to try looking straight ahead while swallowing instead of tilting their head. Sometimes focusing on something else can help!
- Some kids and teens don't like how it feels to swallow a pill and can feel it going down their throat. Remind them that it's normal to feel the pill in your throat, just like when they eat food or drink water. If they don't like the way it feels, encourage them to keep practicing so they can get more used to it.

- It's best to take medications when calm. Remind your child or teen to relax, take a deep breath and slowly let it out before they try to swallow a pill.
- If your child or teen is still having trouble, you can work with a mental health, or child life specialist who can help them learn how to manage their anxiety and swallow pills.
- If your child or teen is having trouble swallowing lots of things (not just pills), talk to their doctor as they may have a condition that makes it difficult to swallow. Your child's doctor can also check if there is another medication, or smaller version of the medication that your child may be able to take instead.

### Tips for parents of young IBD patients:

- For younger children, setting up a sticker chart can be helpful. Reward both the effort (give a reward for practicing a few minutes without giving up) and the successes of swallowing pills.
- Provide enough time for swallowing the pills so the child does not feel pressured.
- DO NOT crush or break the pill—the medication may not work as effectively
- Ignore any negative behaviors. If these continue, it's okay to stop and try again later.
- Some children are afraid because pills may seem too big. Stand in front of a mirror with your child and have them open their mouth in front of a mirror and say “ahhhh,” like they do at the doctor's. Now they can see how big their throat is and not be as scared. You can also show them the pill next to their favorite food or snack so the pill does not seem as large.
- Use their favorite cup for when they take their medication. This will make it seem like it's a special thing they get to do.
- 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!”. You can also encourage them to say positive things like “I'm brave and I can do big kid things!” to help them feel more confident.
- Help your child relax by taking a deep breath (and letting it out slowly) with them before attempting to swallow a pill. For example, you can encourage them to take one or two “box breaths”-
  - inhaling for three seconds
  - holding your breath (full belly) for three seconds
  - exhaling for three seconds
  - holding your breath (empty belly) for three seconds.
  - repeat

### Final Thoughts

Even if your child or teen is feeling well, it's important that they stay on their medication plan. That medication is likely the main reason they are feeling healthy!

Encourage your child or teen to find their own style and what works best for them. Swallowing pills is a skill that takes time to develop, and they will get better at it as time goes on!

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