

How to Give Your Child the Right Dose of Medicine

What do I need to know about my child's medicines?

Both your child's doctor and the pharmacist will give you information about a prescription medicine. Here are some useful things to know about medicines that are to be taken by mouth (oral medicines):

- The name of the medicine
- What the medicine is for
- The dose (amount) of the medicine to give
- The number of times a day the medicine should be given
- The times of the day the medicine should be given
- Whether the medicine can be given with food
- The number of days the medicine should be given
- How you will know the medicine is working
- The most common and important side effects

At the time a medicine is prescribed for your child, you should be sure to tell your doctor these things:

- Other medicines that your child is taking (both prescription and over-the-counter medicines)
- Any drug allergies your child has
- If the medicine costs too much for you to buy

What can I expect from my pharmacist?

The pharmacist should tell you the same things about the medicine that your doctor told you. For liquid medicines, the pharmacist should give you a measuring device and show you the right way to use it. The pharmacist should answer any questions you have about the medicine.

Things to remember about giving medicine to your child

- When your doctor writes “every 6 hours” on a prescription, that generally means the medicine is taken four times a day (for example, at breakfast, lunch, supper and bedtime). It doesn’t generally mean to wake the child up in the night to take medicine. And “take every 8 hours” generally means the medicine should be taken three times a day.
- Ask your doctor or your pharmacist for a medicine information sheet for a new prescription. It will tell you about the medicine.
- If more than one family member goes to the same doctor, make sure each medicine label clearly says whose medicine it is. Ask your doctor to make sure the child’s name is clear on the medicine label.
- Ask your doctor to include on the prescription label what the medicine is for. This helps the pharmacist double-check the prescription.
- Sometimes people think, “If a little medicine is good, a lot is better (or will work quicker).” This is wrong. Giving too much medicine can be harmful. Be sure you only give the prescribed dose of each medicine.
- Even when your child begins to feel better, continue to give as much medicine as the doctor prescribed.
- Use a special measuring device for liquid medicine to get the correct dose. An ordinary kitchen teaspoon may not hold the right amount of medicine.
- If you use a syringe-type measuring device to give liquid medicine to your child, first throw away the small cap of the syringe. Children can choke on these caps.
- If your child has a bad reaction to a medicine or is allergic to a medicine, tell your doctor right away. This is important medical information. You should also keep a record of this information at home: the name of the medicine, the dosage directions and the illness the medicine was prescribed for, and the side effects the medicine caused.
- If you or your child have any problems with a prescription medicine, call your doctor or the pharmacist right away.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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