McMaster Children's Hospital

Help your child learn to swallow pills

Your doctor has recommended that your child take a medication that comes as a pill. Some children need help learning to swallow pills.

Here are some ways you can teach your child to swallow pills:

- Keep a positive attitude about swallowing pills. Use encouraging language. For example, say "I know you will be able to do this."
- Start by having your child swallow something small, like a candy sprinkle. When your child can do this, try a slightly larger candy.
- Work up to a candy that is the same size as the pill your child will be taking.
- Some pills are the size of TicTacs™, Skittles™, Mini M&Ms™, or Mike and Ike™ candies.
- Play the **Pill Swallowing Challenge Game** on the back of this page. Your child can use the chart to keep track of his or her progress. Celebrate each small success along the way.
- Watch 'The New Method of Swallowing' with your child. This video was developed by Dr. Bonnie Kaplan at the University of Calgary. You can find it on YouTube at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXFMZuNs-Fk&feature=related

If your child is still having trouble with pills after trying these steps at home, please ask your doctor for a referral to see a Child Life Specialist.

Make pill swallowing fun!

Use your child's imagination by saying this:

Imagine your tongue is a water slide and your pill wants to go for a ride, down your tongue and into your tummy!

Get ready: Put the pill at the back of your tongue. Now the rider is on the slide!

Get set: Take some water in your mouth, but not too much. If you fill up your cheeks, the rider will float off the slide and the ride will stop.

Go: Swallow and give that rider a wet and wild ride!



Turn over to play the **Pill Swallowing Challenge Game!** ➔

The Pill Swallowing Challenge Game

What you will need:

- Water (or a non-carbonated drink like juice or Gatorade®) and a cup for you and your child
- Candies of different sizes (from 'teeny-tiny' to 'goal size' – see below)
- Stickers as rewards for each level

How to play:

- Help your child get really excited for the game!
- It is best if you do the challenge with your child. Siblings can play too!
- Start at Level 1 by having your child swallow one 'teeny-tiny' candy.
- Give your child a sticker to put on the chart each time he or she tries to swallow the candy. Praise even failed attempts to swallow.
- When your child can swallow a 'teeny-tiny' candy, congratulate his or her success! Go to the next level and have your child swallow a 'tiny' candy.
- Progress through each level until your child reaches the 'goal size'. Once your child can swallow a 'goal size' candy, he or she is ready to swallow the medication. This process may take days to weeks.

Level		Try #1	Try #2	You did it!!
1	**Teeny-tiny** Example – Sprinkle	◯	◯	
2	**Tiny** Example – Confetti Sprinkle	◯	◯	
3	**Mini** Example – Nerd™	◯	◯	
4	**Little** Example – TicTac™	◯	◯	
5	**Goal size** Example – Skittle™	◯	◯	

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