

## Pill Swallowing

Swallowing tablets and capsules is a skill that can be learned. Some learn faster than others. The skill develops with practice. Swallowing pills can be scary. Think of the tablet or capsule as a friend who will help you feel better, not something frightening. Practice will make it easier, you can do it! As a parent, you can help your child learn to swallow tablets automatically. Keep it fun and short.

### Step by step guide: Teaching tablet taking skills

#### Step 1

Your child should be able to swallow water without dribbling. Have your child swallow one of the candy ball “tablets.” It is better not referring to them as lollies during practice as lollies rarely trigger anxiety and the skill may not be transferred to medications.

- Begin with the larger size lolly “tablet” that you know your child can swallow.
- Tell the child to place the lolly “tablet” as far back on the tongue as possible, take a drink of water from a cup and swallow the “tablet.”
- You can have as many practices as needed.
- Most children will manage swallowing these lollies easily. Praise your child for trying and achieving.

Lolly ‘Tablets’ to use starting from the smallest:

- Nerds / silver cake decorations
- Mini M&Ms / Mini Skittles
- Tic-Tac
- M&Ms/Skittles
- Eclipse mint / Jelly Belly
- Jelly beans

#### Step 2

Your child should swallow the lolly “tablet” 5 times in a row. Continue using the same size “tablet” until this is achieved. If they are only successful 4 times, continue with the same size lolly until you have 5 successes. Sessions should last 10–15 minutes; do not prolong the practice if your child becomes upset. Keep in mind the amount of water they have drunk and the degree of anxiety the procedure is causing.

### Step 3

If you move to a bigger-sized lolly “tablet” and your child is unsuccessful, return to a smaller size and end the session on a positive note.

### Step 4

In the next session always begin with the first size lolly “tablet” used at the first session. If your child had success on the first attempt, move immediately to the next size. Try practice sessions, ensuring you always have 5 successes before re-trying the next size that your child was unable to swallow.

Some children are able to swallow all the sizes in one session; others need 2-6 practice sessions.

### Step 5

Progress from lolly “tablets” to actual medications. Once the child progresses through the program to Tic-Tac level, they rarely have difficulty swallowing medication.

### Head Posture Method

This is another method to use, watch “Better than a spoonful of sugar” training video. Familiarise yourself with the technique before teaching your child tablet taking skills. This method is based on head posture.

### Useful Resources

- The importance of pill swallowing skills  
[www.pillswallowing.com/intro.html](http://www.pillswallowing.com/intro.html)
- Pill swallowing techniques for kids and teens  
<http://www.cffa.org/assets/pdfs/PillSwallowing.pdf>

CFWA’s Community nurse is available to assist with pill swallowing. Contact [nurse@cfwa.org](mailto:nurse@cfwa.org) for more information.

*Adapted from ‘Pill Swallowing Made Easy’ Child Study Centre, NYU Langone Medical Centre 2014*

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