

Pill Swallowing

Many children are able to learn to swallow tablets whole between the ages of three and seven. Swallowing medication is a skill that can be learned. Some learn faster than others. The skill develops with practice.

As a parent, you can help your child learn to swallow tablets. The lolly method is a frequently used training tool.

The Lolly Method

Using different sized lollies as “tablets”, you can teach your child to swallow tablets. Start with small lollies and work your way up in size. Your child should be able to swallow water without dribbling before starting this process.

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
- Jellybeans

Note, 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.

Step 1

Begin with the smallest size lolly “tablet”. Tell them to place it as far back on the tongue as possible, take a drink of water from a cup and swallow the “tablet”- have as many practices as needed. Most children will manage swallowing these first lollies easily.



Praise your child for trying and achieving.

Step 2

Your child should successfully swallow the “tablet” five times in a row before progressing. Continue using the same size “tablet” until this is achieved. If they are only successful four times, continue with the same size lolly until you have five successes.

Sessions should last 10-15 minutes; do not prolong the practice if your child becomes upset. Keep in mind the amount of water your child drank and the degree of anxiety the procedure caused.

Step 3

If you move to a bigger-sized “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 “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 five 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 two to six 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

The head posture method is another method. Watch “The Head Posture Method” training video below. Familiarise yourself with the technique before teaching your child tablet taking skills.

CFWA Support with Pill Swallowing

Cystic Fibrosis WA can assist with helping your child to master pill swallowing. Our Child and Family Occupational Therapist, can provide one-on-one support to teach your child to swallow tablets using positive reinforcement techniques. Your child will receive a certificate and prize once successful, as a reward for their hard work.

Contact mel.tibbitts@cfwa.org.au for more information.

Useful Resources

- [Pill Swallowing Video \(CFWA\)](#)
- [The Head Posture Method \(Hardy Nutritionals\)](#)
- [CFWA Factsheets](#)

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