

Pill Swallowing

Learning to swallow tablets can be a difficult skill for children to learn but is important in helping them gain confidence and independence in managing their CF.

Teaching pill swallowing works best when using a calm and positive approach. Every child learns at a different pace, so patience and positive reinforcement are important.

The lolly method and the head posture method are two frequently used training tools.

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

Step 1

Begin with the smallest size lolly “tablet”. Tell your child 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.

You can watch the Lolly Method in action in our pill swallowing video below.

Alternative lolly method

Another version of the ‘lolly method’ is to use lolly snakes or jelly babies added to your child’s choice of flavoured yoghurt, dairy pudding or fruit puree. Have your child assist you in cutting the lolly snakes or jelly babies into very small pieces and place them in the yoghurt or pudding. Encourage your child not to chew the lolly pieces as they swallow. Once your child can confidently swallow the small pieces, assist them to cut the lollies into bigger pieces (similar to the size of the medication they are learning to swallow) and repeat the process. Once successful, encourage your child to swallow the larger pieces with their favourite drink. When they are confident and ready, have them now try swallowing their medication with their favourite drink. See the video from Royal Children’s Hospital below.

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.

Pill swallowing support

Our team can offer one-on-one support to help your child learn to swallow pills. Reach out to our team on services@cfwa.org.au.

Useful resources

- [Pill Swallowing Video](#) (CFWA)
- [Oral Medicine](#) (Royal Children’s Hospital)
- [The Head Posture Method](#) (Hardy Nutritionals)