

FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

Medication compliance

What is medication compliance?

“Medication compliance” is when a patient follows a doctor or pharmacist’s instructions and takes a prescribed medicine.

Why do some children have trouble taking medicines?

Many children and teenagers have trouble taking medicines. The reasons vary depending upon their age, the type of medication and their medical condition.

Typical factors affecting medication compliance:

- Taste of medication
- Formulation (tablets, liquid etc.)
- Volume of the dosage (size of tablets or amount of liquid)
- Method of administering (injection, inhaler, syringe, cup)
- Frequency of doses (number of times per day)
- How long the medication needs to be taken for

Trouble shooting for common issues:

Taste:

- If your child struggles with a taste or brand let your doctor know. Your child may be able to get an different brand, flavour, or formulation.
- Smell affects taste. Block your nose to limit your sense of taste.

- After taking medicine, let your child follow up the medicine with a “chaser” of the child’s choice e.g., apple juice, chocolate milk, small lolly etc.

Formulation

- Some medications will come with options for tablets, capsules, liquids, soluble etc. Your child may prefer one over another.
- Tablet taking is a learnt skill and practicing can be fun. Teach your child to swallow tablets using tic tacs, smarties and 100’s & 1000’s. This is an easy way to build confidence swallowing tablets of different sizes.

Volume of dosage

- Try not to mix medicine with foods or drinks as it increases the volume of the dose and may not mask the taste.
- Ask your doctor if there are other forms of the medication that may be smaller in dosage.

Method of administration

Giving children the power of choice helps them to participate in their taking of medicine. Children are more likely to take the medicine when they feel that they have some choice or control.

- Offer a choice between taking liquids from a medicine cup or a syringe.
- Offer for your child to take their own medicine. This could involve holding the mask, the syringe, or the cup themselves.
- If injections are needed you might like to read our Factsheet on “Children’s painful procedures and operations”.

- Engaging in medical play with items used during medication taking may also be helpful. See our Factsheet on “Medical play”.

Frequency of dosages

The more times per day a medication is needed, the higher the chance of missing a dose, or of non-compliance issues arising.

Some medications may come in a sustained release formula that could offer a decrease in the number of administrations. Speak to your doctor to see what options your child has.

Length of treatment

Children with ongoing illnesses (e.g., cystic fibrosis, epilepsy, asthma, diabetes) are more likely to develop issues with taking medication. Of these children approximately 30 -70 percent have poor adherence at some stage. Research shows that you can improve medication compliance by involving children and adolescents in developing a treatment plan for chronic.

What can parents do to help?

Knowing as much as you can about your child’s condition and the benefits of the prescribed medication will make you feel more confident about giving the medicine. It also helps you in being consistent and firm about why your child needs to take the medicine.

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can give you instructions about the administration of the medicine. They can also give training on using an inhaler, injection, or dropper.

Other helpful hints:

- Adding dosing to daily routines normalises taking medicines and also makes it easier to remember.
- Mark a calendar or use pillboxes so you can keep track of doses taken.
- Set an alarm on your phone as a reminder.
- Use a sticker chart as a way to track dosages and reward your child’s compliance.
- Remember that rewards earned should not be taken back. Use encouragement rather than punishment.
- Remain calm and positive.
- Acknowledge your child’s difficulties.
- Remind your child that taking medication is not negotiable but deciding how to take it is.
- Let your child know that blocking their nose after swallowing can minimise the taste.

- If medication taking is unpleasant for the child, spend time on the topic and then redirect their attention to a pleasant activity quickly afterwards.

For further advice on medication compliance or information on developing a treatment plan please contact your local hospital’s Child Life Therapy Department:

Child Life and Music Therapy Department.
Sydney Children’s Hospital Randwick.
(02) 9382 6984

Sydney Children’s Hospital Westmead
(02) 9845 3717

John Hunter Hospital
(02) 49855 410

Additional resources

[Comfort Positioning Posters](#)

[Medical Play Factsheet](#)

[Children’s Painful Procedures and Operations – How can parents help?](#)

[NPS Medicine wise Medication Compliance Video](#)

References

CRAMER, J., ROY, A., BURRELL, A., FAIRCHILD, C., FULDEORE, M., OLLENDORF, D. & WONG, P. 2007. Medication compliance and persistence: Terminology and definitions. Value in Health Vol 11. No 1, 2008.

GARDINER, P. & DVORKIN, L. 2006. Promoting Medication Adherence in Children. American Family Physician Vol 74, No 5, September 2006.

GREYDANUS, D. & KAPLAN, G. 2012. Strategies to improve medication adherence in youths. Psychiatric Times, March 2012.

Remember:

- Ask your doctor for advice if your child discontinues their medication.
- Always store medications safely out of reach of young children.