



# Giving Medicine to Children:

## Important Safety Information

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Giving medicine in the right way can help your child feel better and get well faster. However, any kind of medicine can cause harm to a child if given the wrong way.

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### What You Need to Know

There are 2 main types of medicine: over-the-counter and prescription medicine. Medicine that a doctor orders from a pharmacy is called *prescription medicine*. Over-the-counter (sometimes called OTC) medicine can be bought without a doctor's prescription. This doesn't mean that OTC medicines are harmless. Like prescription medicine, OTC medicines can be dangerous if not taken the right way.

Read on for more information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) about giving medicines safely to children and what to do if you think your child has swallowed any medicine or substance that might be harmful.

### Here are 4 important steps to follow when giving your child medicine.

1. Keep Medicines Up and Away
2. Read and Follow the Label Directions
3. Give Medicine Only as Recommended
4. Always Measure Liquid Medicines With the Right Dosing Tool

#### 1. Keep Medicines Up and Away

Children are curious and like to explore. Here are ways to help keep them from getting into medicines.

- Keep medicines up high, out of reach, and out of sight. This includes medicine that is in the refrigerator. If possible, keep medicines in a locked cabinet or box or other container.
- Keep medicines in the bottle they came in with the safety caps on tight. Keep in mind that safety caps make it harder for children to get into the medicine, but they do not stop children from getting in the medicine all the time.
- Get rid of old medicines and medicines that you are not using. Look at the medicine box or bottle for the date after which the medicine should not be used (*expiration date*). Medicines that are used after that date can be harmful or may not work well. Learn how to throw out medicines safely by calling 1-800-222-1222 (Poison Help), or check the US Food and Drug Administration Web site at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) for information.

#### 2. Read and Follow the Label Directions

Before you give your child any medicines, be sure you know how to use them. Check the label every time you give medicine to your child. If you need to give medicine at night, turn on the light to make sure you are giving the right medicine. If you have any questions about the medicine, ask your child's doctor, health care professional, or pharmacist.

#### For Over-the-counter Medicines

- **Check the box or bottle.** Make sure it only treats the symptoms your child has.

- **Check the ingredients.** Are the main ingredients ("active ingredients") of the medicine you are giving the same as the ingredients in other medicines your child is taking? It's important that you don't give your child too much of the same medicine. For example, acetaminophen is an ingredient in many OTC and prescription medicines, such as medicines for pain or fever and cough/cold medicines.
- **Check what age the medicine is for.** You may need to contact your child's doctor first for certain ages, such as if your child is younger than 2 years.
- **Check the facts.** Read the side of the medicine box or bottle (the part called "Drug Facts") and check the "Warnings" section.
- **Check the chart.** Check the chart on the label to see how much medicine to give. If you know your child's weight, use that to help you see how much medicine to give. If not, use your child's age.

#### For Prescription Medicines

**Be sure you understand how much, how often, and how long your child needs the medicine.** If you have any questions, ask your child's doctor or pharmacist. For example, you may ask, "The instructions say to give the medicine 4 times a day. Does that mean every 6 hours? If yes, do I need to wake up my child in the middle of the night?" or "My child feels much better. Can I stop giving the medicine?"

#### 3. Give Medicine Only as Recommended Cough and Cold Medicines

The AAP does not recommend OTC cough and cold medicines for children younger than 4 years. Children 4 to 6 years of age should only use OTC cough and cold medicines if a doctor says it is OK. After age 6 years the directions on the package can be followed (but be very careful with dosing).

#### Fever and Pain Medicines

Acetaminophen and ibuprofen can help your child feel better if your child has a headache or body aches or a fever. They can also help with pain from injuries such as a bruise or sprain and from soreness caused by a needle shot.

- **Acetaminophen** for children comes in liquid as well as pills that can be chewed. It also comes as a pill that is put in the rectum (suppository) if your child is vomiting and can't keep down medicine taken by mouth.
- **Ibuprofen** comes in liquid for infants and children and chewable tablets for older children. With ibuprofen, keep in mind that there are 2 different kinds of liquid medicines—one for infants and one for children (including toddlers and children up to age 11 years). Infant drops are stronger (more concentrated) than the medicine for children.

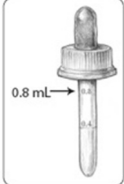
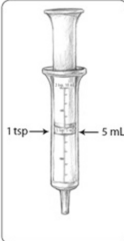
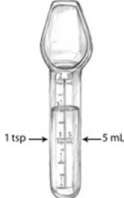
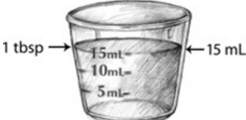
**NOTE:** Always look carefully at the label on the medicine and follow the directions. Each type of medicine has different directions based on the age and weight of a child. You may need to ask your child's doctor about the right dose for your child. For example, you will need to ask how much acetaminophen is the right dose for a child younger than 2 years.

#### 4. Always Measure Liquid Medicines With the Right Dosing Tool

Liquid medicines must be measured carefully. Always use the dosing tool that comes with the medicine or that your child's doctor or pharmacist tells you to use. Never use teaspoons, tablespoons, or other household spoons to measure medicine.

Four types of dosing tools are available: droppers (for infants), syringes, dosing spoons, and medicine cups. The units of measure on a dosing tool may be marked "tsp," "tbsp," or "mL." One tsp (teaspoon) is equal to 5 mL (milliliters), and one tbsp (tablespoon) is equal to 15 mL (milliliters). To measure the right amount, make sure the number and unit for the dose of your child's medicine matches the number and unit on your dosing tool.

#### Types of Dosing Tools

	<p><b>Dropper.</b> In this example, a dropperful is the same as 0.8 mL.</p>
	<p><b>Syringe.</b> 1 tsp is the same as 5 mL.</p>
	<p><b>Dosing spoon.</b> 1 tsp is the same as 5 mL.</p>
	<p><b>Medicine cup.</b> 1 tbsp is the same as 15 mL.</p>

## What to Do for Poisoning

Sometimes parents find their child with something in his or her mouth or with an open bottle of medicine. If you think your child has swallowed any medicine or substance that might be harmful, stay calm and act fast.

- Call 911 or your local emergency number right away if you cannot wake up your child (the child is unconscious), your child is not breathing, or your child is shaking (having convulsions or seizures).
- Call 1-800-222-1222 (Poison Help) if your child is breathing and awake (conscious). A poison expert in your area is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You will be told what to do for your child and whether you can watch your child at home or need to go to the hospital.



NOTE: You should not make a child throw up.

#### From Your Doctor

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