

# Safety with medicines

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When your child is sick, medicines can help them get better, but medicines can also hurt them if you do not use them the right way. Your child's doctor or pharmacist can help you give your child's medicines safely. Before giving any medicine, be sure to follow the safety tips in this teaching sheet.

## **What should I know about my child's medicines?**

Talk with your child's doctor or pharmacist if you have questions about your child's medicine or how to give it. Ask your child's doctor, nurse or pharmacist to write down things you need to know for each medicine. Each time you give a medicine to your child, read the label 3 times to avoid mistakes.

### **Know about the medicine**

This includes:

- The name – both generic and brand names when needed.
- What it is used for and why your child takes it.
- Common and important side effects.
- How to store it. Some medicines need to be kept in the refrigerator.
- When to finish your child's prescribed dose and when the medicine expires. Throw away all medicines after this. Follow the advice on the medicine label, or ask the pharmacist how to dispose of them.

### **Know how to give the right dose of the right medicine at the right time**

This includes:

- How much to give your child (the right dose).
- How to give it, such as by mouth (to swallow) or into the eyes, ears or nose.
- How often to give it.
- What times to give it.
- How long your child should take it.
- How much your child weighs. The dose of many medicines is based on weight.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Safety with medicines, continued

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## Know what to do about foods, drinks and other medicines

This includes:

- Whether to give the medicine with or without food. If the label says to give medicine on an empty stomach, give it **1 hour before a meal or 2 hours after a meal**.
- What foods, drinks or other medicines your child should avoid while taking the medicine. This includes over-the-counter medicines, herbs and supplements.
- If you can mix the medicine with any liquid or food. Ask your child's doctor or pharmacist.
  - Some medicines may be mixed with a small amount of liquid (such as formula or milk) or soft food (such as applesauce or pudding) to cover up the taste.
  - Use only a small amount (1 or 2 teaspoons) of liquid or food to make sure your child takes all the medicine.
- If you can mix medicines together.

## Know about these safety tips when giving your child medicines

This includes:

- Raise your child's head and shoulders to help prevent choking.
- Watch to make sure your child takes the entire dose.
- Never give your child anyone else's medicine.
- If your child is in daycare or school, let your child's teacher and school nurse know that your child is taking medicine.
- Teach your child not to share their medicines with others. This includes medicine patches.
- As your child gets older, teach them about the medicine they take. Help them as they start to take medicines by themselves.

## Know how to give liquid medicines

This includes:

- If the label tells you to **shake well**, shake liquid medicine **for 30 seconds**.
- **Do not** use kitchen spoons to measure your child's medicine. Use a pediatric measuring device, such as an oral syringe or dropper. You can buy these at your pharmacy.

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# Safety with medicines, continued

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## Know how to give tablets and capsules

This includes:

- Do not crush any tablet or open any capsule unless advised by your child's doctor or pharmacist.
- If they say it is OK:
  - You may crush some tablets, and then mix them with a small amount of liquid or food. You can crush tablets between 2 spoons or a spoon and piece of wax paper. You can also buy pill splitters and crushers at your pharmacy.
  - You may open some capsules so that the medicine in them can be added to a small amount of liquid or food.
- If you add a crushed tablet or the contents of a capsule to liquid or food, make sure your child drinks or eats the mixture as soon as it is mixed.

## Know what to do if problems happen

This includes:

- What to do if your child throws up after taking medicine. Check with your child's doctor. Some medicines are OK to give again. Some are not.
- Not to give extra doses or skip doses.
  - If you forget a dose, give it as soon as you remember.
  - If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose, but **do not give 2 doses at the same time**.
  - If you are not sure whether to give the forgotten dose or skip it, call your child's doctor or pharmacist.

## Know what to do about over-the-counter medicines

This includes:

- Check the type, strength and dose of the medicine carefully. Many medicines come in different forms and strengths.
- Use only the measuring device that comes with the medicine.
- Do not confuse teaspoons and tablespoons. Teaspoons and tablespoons are not the same.
  - Teaspoon is also written as "tsp"
  - Tablespoon is also written as "tbsp"
- Look at the active ingredients section on the medicine label. Do not use 2 medicines at the same time that have the same active ingredient.
- Do not use cough and cold medicines for children younger than 6 years old unless advised by your child's doctor.

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# Safety with medicines, continued

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- Check with your child’s doctor or pharmacist before giving any over-the-counter medicines, supplements or herbs with any other prescription medicines.

## Know how to check medicines at the pharmacy

This includes:

- Make sure the medicine is for your child and is the right medicine.
- Make sure you can read the label and understand the directions. Ask the pharmacist if you have any questions.
- Ask the pharmacist to double-check your child’s medicine if it:
  - Looks different than before **and/or**
  - Does not match the size **and/or** color description on the bottle.

## Know how to keep your child safe

This includes:

- Keep all medicines in their labeled container where your child cannot get to them. If possible, store them in a locked cabinet. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines, eye, ear and nose drops and sprays, creams, lotions, vitamins, supplements and herbs.
- Ask visitors to keep their purses, suitcases and coats that have medicine in them up and away from your child. Keep your things up and away when you visit someone else.
- Teach your child that medicines are **NOT** candy. Do not call medicine patches stickers or tattoos.
- Throw away all medicines when your child has finished the prescribed dose or after the medicine expires. Follow the advice on the medicine label, or ask the pharmacist how to dispose of them.

## Know who to call if problems happen

This includes:

- Call your child’s doctor or pharmacist if you have questions or concerns about medicines, such as questions about the right dose or side effects of a medicine.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Safety with medicines, continued

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- **Call 911 or take your child to the nearest emergency department (ED) right away** if you have an urgent concern or emergency or if your child has a bad reaction to their medicine, such as:
  - Hives (raised, reddish skin bumps)
  - Swelling of the mouth, eyes or face
  - Trouble breathing or wheezing
  - Changes in the way they normally acts
  - Blue or purple nails or around the mouth
  - Chest pain or tightness
  - Feeling faint or not being as awake and alert as normal
- Call the Georgia Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222, or call 911 **right away** if your child takes too much medicine.

## For more details on medicine safety

You may visit these websites:

- Safe Medication – [safemedication.com/pharmacist-insights/2021/giving-your-children-medicine](https://safemedication.com/pharmacist-insights/2021/giving-your-children-medicine)
- Institute for Safe Medication Practices – [ismmp.org](https://ismmp.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – [cdc.gov/medicationsafety/protect/campaign.html](https://cdc.gov/medicationsafety/protect/campaign.html)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – [cdc.gov/MedicationSafety/parents\\_childrenAdverseDrugEvents.html](https://cdc.gov/MedicationSafety/parents_childrenAdverseDrugEvents.html)
- Up and Away – [upandaway.org](https://upandaway.org)

*Children's Healthcare of Atlanta has not reviewed all of the sites listed as resources and does not make any representations regarding their content or accuracy. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta does not recommend or endorse any particular products, services or the content or use of any third party websites, or make any determination that such products, services or websites are necessary or appropriate for you or for the use in rendering care to patients. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is not responsible for the content of any of the above-referenced sites or any sites linked to these Sites. Use of the links provided on this or other sites is at your sole risk.*

**This teaching sheet contains general information only.  
Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Safety with medicines, continued

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## My child's medicine record

Use this medicine record to keep track of your child's medicines. Ask your child's doctor, nurse or pharmacist to help you fill it out.

- Include prescription and over-the-counter medicines, supplements and herbs.
- For each medicine, write down how much your child takes (dose) and how often they take it.
- Include the name and phone number of the pharmacy where you get your child's medicines.
- Make sure all of your child's doctors and dentists have a current and complete list. Update the list as often as needed.
- **List all medicines and/or food allergies your child has. Make sure your child's doctor, dentist and pharmacist know about these allergies.**

My child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

My child's allergies \_\_\_\_\_

My child's doctor's name and phone number \_\_\_\_\_

My child's pharmacy name and phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Name and strength of medicine	What it is used for	How my child takes it (swallows or other ways)	My child's dose	How many times a day my child takes it	Special instructions

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.