

## Medicine safety

Medicines work best when given correctly: the right dose, the right time, and the right way. You are our partner in your child's health care. The more you learn about your child's medicine, and the more careful you are with it, the safer your child will be. Always feel free to ask questions about your child's medicines.

### What should I know about my child's medicine?

Each time a new medicine is prescribed, be sure to ask the doctor or pharmacist:

- name and purpose of the medicine
- what it looks like
- how much to give (use standard measuring spoons for liquids)
- when and how to give it
- how often and for how long to give it
- how it interacts with foods, other medicines, or other medical conditions
- side effects that may occur
- side effects to call the doctor about

### What should I do at the hospital?

When your child comes to the hospital, clinic, or emergency department, bring a list or the containers of all medicines your child is taking: prescriptions, over the counter medicines, vitamins, and herbs. Mention any allergies your child has.

### What should I do at home?

Before giving the first dose, read the prescription label. Be sure it is what was prescribed. If you do not understand something or need more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

After a refill, if the medicine looks different, ask your pharmacist before giving it.

Check the label and expiration date before giving each dose. Ask your pharmacist what to do with outdated or unused medicines. If there is no "take-back" program:

1. Find a leak-proof container with a lid, such as a detergent bottle or yogurt container.
2. Empty the medicines into it.
3. Add a liquid to help pills break down.
4. Add coffee grounds, dirt, flour, kitty litter, salt, or other substance.
5. Put on the lid and throw it in the trash.

Store all medicines in their original containers and away from direct sunlight or heat. Do not store in humid places such as the bathroom. Keep them out of children's reach, locked up if possible. If it must be refrigerated, put it on the top shelf of the refrigerator.

Always make sure you have enough medicine on hand. Each time you refill the prescription, check to see how many refills are left. If no refills are left the pharmacy will need 2 or 3 days to contact the clinic to renew the prescription.

You may want to keep a chart of medicine doses. See the chart on the last page.

### Giving medicines to a child

Your child should be awake and alert when taking any medicine. Here are some ways to give medicines to children:

**Liquid medicine:** Shake well right before using. Draw up the correct amount in the medicine dropper or oral syringe. Give a small

squirt of the medicine inside the cheek. To avoid choking, let your child swallow each squirt before giving more.

For babies, you may want to mix the medicine with a small amount of formula or breast milk and give it with a bottle nipple before feeding. **Do not** add the medicine to a whole bottle because if your baby does not finish it, you will not know how much of the medicine was taken.

**For children who cannot swallow pills**, check with the pharmacist whether it is okay to crush the tablet or open the capsule. If so, follow these steps:

1. If it is a tablet, crush it between 2 spoons, inside a plastic bag, or in folded paper.
  - If it is a capsule, open it.
2. Mix the powder with a **very small** amount (about 1 teaspoon) of soft food, such as applesauce, chocolate syrup, or jelly. Make sure your child takes all of the mixture.

Do not let anyone else use the medicine.

### **What should I do if a dose is missed?**

Call the clinic or pharmacy. **Never give a double dose.**

### **What is a food - drug interaction?**

Some foods can prevent a medicine from working as it should. For example, acid foods, dairy products, or alcohol may make the body absorb less of it, or eliminate it more quickly.

Timing matters, too. Some medicines are best absorbed when taken on an empty stomach (1 hour before or 2 hours after eating). But other medicines should be taken with food to avoid stomach upset. **Ask your doctor or pharmacist** about how to time meals and medicine doses.

Food-drug interactions can occur with both prescription and over-the-counter medicines, including antacids, vitamin and herbal supplements, and iron pills.

Take medicine with a full glass of water. Do not mix a medicine into hot drinks, because heat may destroy its actions. Never take medicine with alcoholic drinks.

### **What is a drug - drug interaction?**

When two or more medicines react with each other, they may cause problems. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all medicines your child is taking, including prescription or non-prescription medicines, herbs, or vitamins. Even over-the-counter medicines can cause problems. Do not give vitamins and medicine at the same time unless approved by the doctor or pharmacist.

Read directions, warnings, and interaction precautions printed on all medicine labels and package inserts.

### **What is a drug - condition interaction?**

Certain drugs can be harmful if your child has an existing medical condition: for example, high blood pressure, breathing problems, or glaucoma. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any such conditions.

### **When should I call for medical help?**

- For swelling, trouble breathing, seizure, or unconsciousness, **call 911.**
- For a rash or other side effects, call the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist. Don't stop giving the medicine without asking first.
- If too much or the wrong kind of medicine is taken, **call Poison Control** at 1-800-222-1222.

## Medicine chart for \_\_\_\_\_ (name)

1. List each medicine, each time it is to be given, and the amount to give. List each medicine the same number of times as it is to be taken each day. (See example.) Add dates.
2. Hang this chart where it can be easily seen, such as on a cupboard door or the refrigerator.
3. Under each date, put a check mark after each medicine dose is taken.
4. For as-needed medicines, write the time it was taken in the column for that date.

Times to give	Scheduled medicines and amount	Dates													
8 a.m.	Example: Medicine A, amount	√													
8 p.m.	Medicine A, amount														
As-needed medicines, and amount		Time(s) taken													

### Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child but provides general information. If you have specific questions about medicines, please ask the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist. For ideas on helping your child cooperate with taking medicines, call Children’s child life department at Minneapolis campus: (612) 813-6259, or St. Paul campus: (651) 220-6465.

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