

# Medicine Safety

## General Information

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.

## What Should You Know About Your 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
- when to call the doctor.

## What Should You 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. Include prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbs. Mention any allergies your child has.

## What Should You Do at Home?

- Before giving the first dose, read the prescription label. 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 Ask your pharmacist what to do with outdated or unused medicines.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:
  - Find a leak-proof container with a lid, such as a detergent bottle or yogurt container.
  - Empty the medicines into it.
  - Add a liquid to help pills break down.
  - Add coffee grounds, dirt, flour, kitty litter, salt or another substance.
  - Put on the lid and throw it in the trash.
- Keep all medicines in their original containers. Keep them away from direct sunlight or heat. Don't store them in humid places, such as the bathroom.
- Keep all medicines out of children's reach, locked up if possible. If it must be kept in the refrigerator, put it on the top shelf.
- Always make sure you have enough medicine.

- 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.

## How Do You Give Medicines?

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 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 breastmilk 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 OK 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 You Do if a Dose is Missed?

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

## What is a Food - Medicine Interaction?

Some foods can keep a medicine from working as it should. For example, acid foods or dairy products may make the body absorb less of it, or get rid of 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-medicine interactions can occur with both prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Do not mix a medicine into hot drinks, because heat may destroy its actions.

## What is a Medicine - Medicine 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 over-the-counter medicines, herbs or vitamins. Don't give vitamins and medicine at the same time unless approved by the doctor or pharmacist.

## What is a Medicine - Condition Interaction?

Certain medicines can be harmful if your child has a certain condition, such as high blood pressure or breathing problems. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any conditions.

## When Should You Call for Help?

- Call 911 for swelling, trouble breathing, seizure or unconsciousness.
- Call your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for a rash or other side effects. 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.