

Contact Us

Urgent Questions or Concerns

Telehealth Nursing
651-229-3890

Other Questions About Your Care

Contact a member of your
Gillette health care team.

Appointments

651-290-8707

Learning How to Swallow Pills

Many children and adults have difficulty swallowing pills. Sometimes you can crush a pill or take a liquid form of the medication, but there are times when you can't. Follow these directions, and with practice, patience and perseverance, you'll learn how to swallow pills more easily.

Gather Supplies

You need different sizes of sugar-based candies for practice "pills." Cake Mate or Betty Crocker brand Decorating Decors, Wilton brand Sprinkles, and Tic Tac mints work well. In grocery stores, you can find Decorating Decors and Sprinkles in the cake-decorating section and Tic Tacs in the candy section or check-out lanes. These candies range from the size of a pin head to the size of a small pill.

Buy the Decorating Decors, Sprinkles and Tic Tac products listed below, from the smallest to largest candy "pill."

- Multicolored (nonpareil) mixed balls
- Small silver balls
- Snowflake shapes
- Large silver balls
- Cinnamon or fruit drops (cut in half for first use, then use whole)
- Tic Tac mint candies

Start Practicing

If you can swallow water without difficulty, start a session with the most appropriate size candy "pill" that you can comfortably swallow. Most children and adults find swallowing these balls surprisingly easy, so the first attempt is almost always a positive one.

Practice this procedure as many times as you need to:

1. Place one candy ball as far back on your tongue as possible.
2. Take a drink of water from a cup (not a fountain).
3. Swallow the "pill."

Continue Practicing

After five consecutive successful attempts, move up to the next larger-sized candy pill. Practice swallowing the candy pill five times at each level.

What if I can't swallow the pill five times in a row?

Continue the procedure using the same size candy pill—even if you have swallowed the candy four times in a row and then failed on the fifth try.

How long should each session take?

Sessions generally last 10 to 15 minutes. However, don't prolong the session so long that it makes you anxious and not want to do it again.

What if I move up to a larger candy pill and can't swallow it?

Return to the previous size pill before ending the session so you end the session with success.

What if I take a break and start a new session later?

In subsequent sessions, always begin with the smaller candy pill used at the first session. If you swallow it easily on the first attempt, move directly on to the next size, and so on. Some people are able to move through all the sizes easily in one session. Other people might need more time and take anywhere from two to six sessions.

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Swallow Your Actual Medication

Finally, move from swallowing the candy pills to swallowing your actual medication. Most children who progress from the smallest candy pill through the Tic Tac can easily swallow medication.

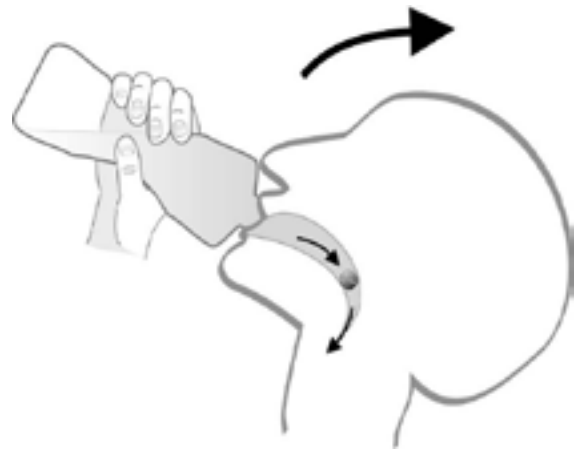
Other Ways to Help Make Swallowing Pills (Tablets or Capsules) Easier

For Tablets: Water Bottle Method

This method allows your throat to automatically open, then triggers a natural urge to swallow.

IMPORTANT: Do **NOT** use this method for capsules, because they float on water.

1. Obtain a flexible plastic bottle with a small opening—the kind typically used for most bottled water sold in stores. Be sure there is water in the bottle.
1. Put the tablet (or a candy ball, for practice) on your tongue and close your lips tightly around the bottle opening.
2. Take a drink. Keep your lips pursed and attached to the bottle, using a sucking action.
3. Tilt your head back a little when you swallow, to make it easier to get the tablet down.

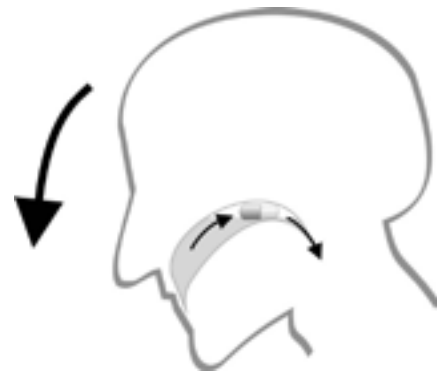


Water Bottle Method

For Capsules: Lean-Forward Method

This method is generally recommended for swallowing capsules, especially if someone has difficulty swallowing.

1. Use a cup of water.
2. Put the capsule (or candy ball, for practice) on your tongue.
3. Take a sip of water from the cup, but do not swallow yet.
4. Tilt your chin toward your chest to bend your head forward.
5. Swallow the pill and water while your head is in that position.



Lean-Forward Method

Questions?

For more information, talk to a nurse or call Telehealth Nursing at (651) 229-3890.

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