Using Liquid Medicines

Many children's medicines come in liquid form. Liquid medicines are easier to swallow than pills. But they must be used the right way.

Types of Liquid Medicines
There are 2 types of liquid medicines:
- Medicines you can buy without a doctor’s prescription (called over-the-counter or OTC)
- Medicines a doctor prescribes

OTC Medicines
All OTC medicines have the same kind of label. The label gives important information about the medicine. It says what it is for, how to use it, what is in it, and what to watch out for. Look on the box or bottle, where it says “Drug Facts.”

Check the chart on the label to see how much medicine to give. If you know your child’s weight, use that first. If not, go by age. Check the label to make sure it is safe for infants and toddlers younger than 2 years. If you are not sure, ask your child’s doctor.

Prescription Liquid Medicines
Your child’s doctor may prescribe a liquid medicine. These medicines will have a different label than OTC medicines. Always read the label before you give the medicine to your child.

With OTC or prescription medicines, be sure to call your child’s doctor or pharmacist* if you have any questions about:
- How much medicine to give.
- How often to give it.
- How long to give it.

Word to Know

pharmacist (FARM-uh-sist)—a person who has special training to fill prescriptions and teach people about their medicines.

A Word About Infant Drops
Infant drops are stronger than syrup for toddlers. Parents may make the mistake of giving higher doses of infant drops to a toddler, thinking the drops are not as strong. Be sure the medicine you give your child is right for his or her weight and age.

How to Give Liquid Medicines
Follow the directions exactly. Some parents give their children too much medicine. This will not help them get better faster. And it can be very dangerous, especially if you give too much for several days. Always read the label carefully.

How to Measure Liquid Medicines
Use the dropper, syringe (sir-INJ), medicine cup, or dosing spoon that comes with the medicine. If nothing comes with your medicine, ask your pharmacist for help. Kitchen tablespoons or teaspoons are usually not the right size.
Medicine can be measured in different ways. You may see teaspoon (tsp), Tablespoon (Tbsp or TBSP), or milliliters (mL, ml, or mLs).

**Tips**
- 1 teaspoon (tsp) = 5 milliliters (mL)
- 3 teaspoons (tsp) = 1 Tablespoon (TBSP)
- 1 Tablespoon (TBSP) = 15 milliliters (mL)

### Medicine Cups
Be sure to use the cup that comes with the medicine. These often come over the lids of liquid cold and flu medicines. Don’t mix and match cups to different products. You might end up giving the wrong amount.

*Don’t* just fill it up. Look carefully at the lines and letters on the cup. Use the numbers to fill the cup to the right line. Ask your pharmacist to mark the right line if you are not sure. Be sure the cup is level. You can check by putting it on a flat surface.

### Dosing Spoons
These work well for older children who can “drink” from the spoon. Use only the spoon that comes with the medicine. Be sure to use the lines and numbers to get the right amount for your child. Or ask your pharmacist to mark the right line if you are not sure.

*Fill the dosing spoon while holding it upright.*

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at www.aap.org. Your child’s doctor will tell you to do what’s best for your child. This information should not take the place of talking with your child’s doctor. Adaptation of the AAP information in this handout into plain language was supported in part by McNeil Consumer Healthcare.

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