

Safety Tips for Giving Medicine to Children

Giving medicine to children can be challenging. This newsletter gives you tips on how to safely choose, give and store medications to children.

General Medicine Safety Tips

Following these general guidelines can help prevent medication side effects and overdoses:

- Always check with a doctor or pharmacist before giving a child medicine.
- Don't give an adult's medicine to a child; even low doses of adult medicines can be harmful for children.
- Use a measuring device to make sure you give the correct dose.
- Be sure to ask about what side effects to expect and what to do to prevent or treat them before you give a medicine.
- Make a list of your child's allergies and medications and show it to all doctors, pharmacists and dentists that care for your child.
- Store medications in a cool, dry place way from children's reach.

When to see a Doctor

Children often get minor ailments that can be safely treated using OTC medications. However, a child should be seen by a doctor when:

- Symptoms are severe
- Symptoms have persisted for longer than typically expected
- The infant or child is getting sicker even with treatment
- The medicine seems to be causing side effects

Choosing an OTC Medication

OTC medications are ideal for mild symptoms that last for a short time. When selecting an OTC product be sure to choose one that is designed for an infant or child. Additional safety measures include:

- Choose products that only have a single ingredient. This allows you to give the child only the ingredients that are needed and lowers the chance for side effects.

- If giving two or more medicines, check the active ingredient list to make sure that the products do not contain the same type of ingredient.
- Always check the expiration date on the package before giving the medicine. If it is past the expiration date, throw the medicine out.
- To prevent drug interactions always check with a pharmacist before giving a medication.

A Special Note about Cough and Cold Products

About 7,000 children go to the emergency room (ER) each year due to side effects from acetaminophen and anti-histamines. The most common cause of these ER visits is the use of two medicines that contain similar ingredients. For example, using two products that both contain acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol and Triaminic Cough and Sore Throat) can result in liver damage. Using two products that both contain anti-histamines (e.g., Benadryl and Dimetapp Multi-Symptoms Cold & Flu) can result in heart problems.

Giving the Right Dose

- Read the label directions every time the medicine is given. Read them when you buy the product, read them again when you prepare the dose and read them right before giving the medicine to the child.
- The dose given should be based on the weight of the child, not his or her age.
- Don't give a higher dose than is recommended. If symptoms are severe, a doctor should see the child.
- Do not give the medicine more often than recommended even if the symptoms are severe or return sooner.
- Use the measuring device that comes with the medicine or ask the pharmacist for a dosage spoon. Tableware teaspoons and tablespoons vary in size and can result in overdoses if used.

Making it Easier to Swallow

Getting children to swallow medicine can be challenging. Try these techniques to make the process go smoother.

- Do not ask a child to take medicine. Just be firm and give the dose.
- If a pill is prescribed, ask if a liquid form of the medicine is available.

- Some medicines can be crushed and mix with a little applesauce, Jell-O or pudding. Not all medicines work well if they are crushed so ask a pharmacist before doing this.
- Squirt liquid medicines towards the inside of the cheek where there are no taste buds.
- Most pharmacies offer flavorings to improve the taste of the medicine.
- If a child tries to spit out a medicine, hold his cheeks together gently.
- If a child spits out only a little of the medicine, do not give another dose.
- If a child vomits right after the dose, wait 10 minutes and repeat the dose. If the child vomits again, call a doctor.

Storage

Storing medications is important so that young children do not accidentally get access to medications.

- Keep child resistant caps on prescription medicines.
- Remind grandparents to keep medications out of the reach of visiting grandchildren. Make sure that purses containing medications are out of the reach of children.
- Unfortunately, prescription drug abuse is rising among elementary and high school children. Keeping medications out of sight or locked away can help prevent misuse.

We hope these safety and medication use help you the next time you're caring for a little one.

Remember, if you have any medication questions or wish to get a list of useful health-related websites, please contact us at <http://www.justaskblue.com>. Be sure to check out our website for our past newsletters!