

Measuring liquid medicines for children



Whether it's a prescription or an over-the-counter medicine, it is critical that medicines for children are measured accurately. Young children are more sensitive to the effects of medicines than adults, because their bodies are smaller and not as well developed. Even small measuring errors can cause large differences in the amount given, which can cause serious harm.

Different strengths and forms for different ages

Children's liquid medicines often come in different forms and strengths for different ages. For example, paracetamol often comes in three strengths: drops for babies, suspensions for young children (1-5 years), and other suspensions for older children (5-12 years). Drops are usually much more concentrated than suspensions. It is vital that you know the strength of the medicine when measuring a child's dose, so you don't over or under dose them.

Measuring and giving medicines

Always use a proper medicine measuring device. An oral syringe is the most accurate measuring device, so use one where possible. If you don't have an oral syringe, use the measuring device provided with the medicine. Never use a kitchen spoon or a device from another medicine.

Always read the instructions to check that the medicine is appropriate for the child's age and weight, and to calculate the correct dose.

For young children, the correct dose usually depends on their weight. If you don't know the child's weight, weigh yourself on a set of bathroom scales while holding the child. Then, weigh yourself without them. The difference in the two weights is the child's weight. Don't guess their weight, and weigh them regularly. If the child is particularly large or small for their age, check the dose calculations with your doctor or pharmacist.

Keep a record

Each time you give a medicine to a child, keep a record of the time and amount of medicine given. This will help you to keep track of the amount given and help to make sure the maximum daily dose is not exceeded. Take this information with you when visiting any health professionals.

The important information to record includes:

- ▶ date and time given
- ▶ the medicine's active ingredient and brand name
- ▶ medicine's strength
- ▶ exact amount given
- ▶ why the medicine was given
- ▶ who the medicine was given by
- ▶ daily total.

When more than one person is caring for a sick child, it is easy for the child to be given too many or not enough doses of medicine. Keeping a written record will help prevent mistakes. Make sure that every carer has clear, written instructions about when and how much medicine to give the child.

[How to use an oral syringe ▶](#)

Oral syringes

Oral syringes are often used for giving liquid medicines to children, because they measure small doses of liquids more accurately than other measuring devices. They come in different sizes, so check the measurement markings to make sure it can measure the correct dose.



Using an oral syringe

1. Shake the bottle, if necessary, and put it on a hard surface.

2. Insert the syringe into the bottle.



3. Draw up the liquid by pulling the plunger upwards, until the bottom of the rubber stopper (not the top) reaches the required mark.

4. Check that you have the correct amount by holding the syringe upside down at eye level. Ensure there are no air bubbles before giving it to the child.

5. Place the syringe into the side of the child's cheek, and gently squirt the plunger until all the liquid has been given.



Further information

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