



## Teaching your child to swallow tablets



Often children with CF have to start taking tablets quite early. Tablet swallowing is usually introduced at around 2 to 4 years old. However, each child learns this skill at a different rate.

As a parent you can help your child learn the skill of tablet swallowing. Keep it short and fun and follow this step-by-step guide. Remember, it is best to learn in a low-pressure environment and give lots of positive praise for any attempts!

While your child is learning to swallow tablets, you can continue to empty the contents of enzymes into acidic foods such as applesauce, fruit puree/gel, tomato sauce or yogurt.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

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When you feel your child is ready to learn how to swallow tablets, the following method may help. Your child should be able to swallow water without dribbling.

#### Step 1: Teach the concept of swallowing

Your child may not yet understand what it means to actively swallow, so teaching the concept is an important first step.

- Model swallowing to your child: Take a spoonful of food or drink and show them how you swallow. Try to exaggerate the motion of swallowing. You might find it helpful to gesture with your hand to show how the food or drink travels from your mouth, down your throat to your stomach. You may make a “gulp” or swallow sound.
- Children often respond well to seeing that the food is “all gone!”, so open your mouth after you swallow to show them that the food has disappeared.
- Try to emphasise that swallowing means *not* chewing the food.

#### Step 2: Practice swallowing with small lollies

A graded approach helps prepare your child for swallowing tablets. It begins with teaching your child to swallow *small* lollies in *thick* foods. We typically refer to these as little “tablets” rather than “lollies”.

If your child typically takes their enzymes with apple sauce, this is often a good choice to teach tablet swallowing. You can also use yogurt, custard, jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter, etc. You will need lollies of different sizes, and aim to build up from small to large.



#### Example of lolly sizes from smallest to largest:

- 100s & 1000s
- Sugar pearls (cake decorating)
- ½ sultana or mini m&ms or ½ tic tac
- Full sultana or tic tac
- Jelly snakes or jelly lollies (can be cut)



#### Steps to swallowing small lollies:

- Start by getting your child to practice swallowing the apple sauce alone. Place a spoonful in their mouth and encourage them to do a “big swallow”. This will help your child understand what you are practicing.
- Next, place a small lolly (e.g. 100s & 1000s) on a spoonful of apple puree. Your child can push the lolly into the puree so it is covered.
- Again, demonstrate what you want your child to do. You can put the spoonful into your mouth and swallow in one movement, then open your mouth to reveal it’s “all gone”.
- Then, place a spoon of puree with the lolly into your child’s mouth and encourage a “big swallow”.
- **IMPORTANT:** Provide lots of praise for effort and success. This helps motivate your child to practice swallowing.

#### Step 3: Practice swallowing with larger lollies

When your child is able to consistently swallow the smallest lolly in one motion (not chewing or holding it in their mouth) you can increase to the next size. Keep practicing this size until your child can swallow 5 times successfully in a row, then increase the size until you reach the desired tablet size.

If you move up to a bigger-sized lolly and your child is unsuccessful, return to a smaller size so you can end the practice on a positive note.

#### Step 4: Move to tablets

Once your child is able to consistently swallow lollies the size of tic-tacs, then progress to tablets. Continue to provide lots of praise!

#### Step 5: Teach swallowing tablets with water

After some time taking tablets mixed with thick foods you may want to teach your child to swallow tablets with water (when they are late toddler or starting school age). Use the same method as above to teach your child to swallow tablets with water (i.e. start by swallowing 100s & 1000s with water, and then progress up the sizes until you reach tic-tacs with water).



### **Additional resources: Teaching your child to swallow tablets**

- Video: How to help children swallow pills
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9n-Y\\_QfEjg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9n-Y_QfEjg)
- Video: CF my way – Learning to swallow pills with Braeden
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRSqWqxVTKE>
- Video: Explanation of the 'food pipe' and 'wind pipe'
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXFMZuNs-Fk>