

Cystic Fibrosis all about nutrition

Teaching children to swallow their enzymes

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust is grateful to the dietitians from the Cystic Fibrosis Dietitian Group UK (CFDGUK) who prepared the information in this leaflet.

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Learning a new skill

Swallowing enzyme capsules is a new skill for your child to learn. If you have been thinking of teaching your child to swallow their enzymes for a while, it can be really helpful to prepare your child before you start. Talk about it when you're giving open enzyme capsules on a spoon. You can say something like: "When you are older, you will be able to swallow your enzymes/Creon®/tummy pills whole with a drink.". You could open the capsule and remove all the granules so your child can put the emptied capsule in their mouth to help them understand its size and how it feels.

As with learning any new skill, learning to swallow enzymes and other pills takes practice. It might help to remind your child of something else they have learned to do through practising, like writing their name or riding a bike.

Many medicines including enzymes need to be swallowed whole and should not be chewed. Each child is different, so the age at which a child learns to swallow their enzymes will vary. Many children are ready to start swallowing enzyme capsules whole from around two or three years old, although some children start later.

It's a good idea to:

- aim to practise for 5 to 10 minutes a day for about two weeks
- practise without the distraction of either television or phones
- stay positive and use praise – even if your child doesn't succeed, praise something they did (eg "I like the way you opened your mouth wide" or "I could hear you swallowing the drink. That was good").

Don't expect your child to pick it up overnight and if your child isn't interested you should leave it for a few weeks and then try again.

There are a few methods you can try that might help your child learn to swallow enzymes. See which one best suits your child.

Learn with something that is not a pill first

Try getting your child to swallow something very small, and then gradually increase the size once they have got used to it. You can involve your child when you buy a selection of sweets of different sizes. You could start by trying an ice cream sprinkle and progress to Nerds®, a chocolate chip, a Tic Tac® or a jelly baby which has been cut up into small pieces. (You could get your child to help cut the jelly baby into pieces). Once your child can swallow small sweets, choose a bigger sweet or cut bigger pieces of jelly baby, and repeat the process until you feel they are ready to try with an enzyme capsule, or another of their medications which can be swallowed.



Showing your child how to do it

A different method you could try is showing your child how to do it and seeing if they can copy you. If you think the enzyme capsules are too big, you could start with a small vitamin capsule, if your child takes these, or a sweet. Show your child how easy it is to swallow this capsule by doing it yourself. If you think it will help, you can get your child to practice with empty enzyme capsules. This way you can practice a few times without being concerned about matching enzyme doses with the food eaten.

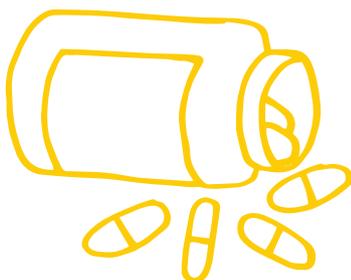
Swallowing capsules from a spoon

If putting the capsule or sweet onto your child's tongue isn't working for your child, you could try using a spoon and some yogurt or fruit puree. This can help the capsule to slip down and your child will already be familiar with the granules and puree/yogurt on the spoon. Continue in this way until your child feels confident with it and then swap to trying to swallow it without the spoon and puree/yogurt (and just using a drink).

Teaching your child to swallow: step-by-step

1. Make sure your child has a drink.
2. Ask your child to sit up straight with their head in a central position. This is likely to be the position your child uses to swallow when drinking and eating. Avoid tilting the head too far back as it can make swallowing more difficult.
3. Ask your child to take a few sips of water to 'practise' swallowing and to listen to the sound it makes when they swallow.
4. Put the item onto your child's tongue (or let them do it themselves) and then ask them to drink again. Ask them to listen to the noise it makes as they swallow.

Did they swallow it? If they did you will of course congratulate them! Even once a child can swallow an enzyme, it doesn't always work every time, sometimes it doesn't go to the right place in their mouth or they have a different amount of drink and it doesn't go down. Tell your child that it is great that they can do it and that you can keep practising it until it works every time.



Rewarding their progress

Consider the following ways of rewarding positive steps forward, this can be used for a child of three or older.

1. Each time your child tries to swallow or successfully swallows the 'pill' they are learning with, they can put an item (eg dried pasta or plastic balls) into a jar. Your child can see the amount increasing within the jar.
2. Create a chart like the one below and ask your child to put a sticker, a tick, draw an enzyme or add a smile in any box when they have swallowed an enzyme at a meal or snack time.

Plan a reward for when the jar or reward chart is full (eg time spent together doing something the child enjoys, small prizes, or a lucky-dip box. (Make sure the reward jar/chart is achievable, eg a younger child may need a smaller jar or larger objects to fill it up. Avoid expensive rewards as you may want to reward new skills and achievements often).

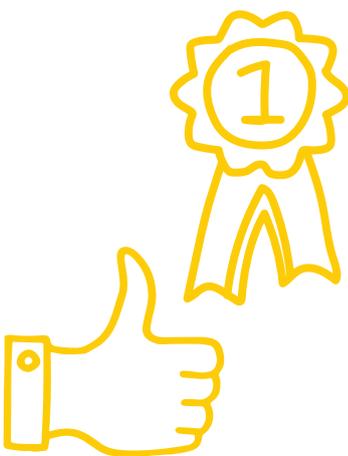
| | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thurs | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Breakfast | | | | | | | |
| Morning snack | | | | | | | |
| Lunch | | | | | | | |
| Afternoon snack | | | | | | | |
| Dinner | | | | | | | |
| After dinner snack | | | | | | | |

If your child is still struggling to swallow enzymes you should talk to their CF team.

Further information

The following film may be helpful '**Video 2, Better than a spoon of sugar – How to swallow pills: One complete training session**'. It was created by Professor Bonnie Kaplan and her research students at the University of Calgary and has links to Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute, both in Canada. This method involves using different head positions when learning to swallow something.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK1xdhEIRjs



Cystic Fibrosis Trust

The information in this leaflet is general, please discuss it with your child's dietitian for a more personalised look at the topic.

This leaflet is part of a broad series on nutrition. Leaflets are available as online downloads and printed copies and can be found here: cysticfibrosis.org.uk/nutritionleaflets. You can also order the leaflets and our other publications from our helpline or download them here: cysticfibrosis.org.uk/publications.

Our helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm, and can be contacted on 0300 373 1000 or by emailing helpline@cysticfibrosis.org.uk. Trained staff can provide a listening ear, practical advice, welfare/benefits information or direct you to other sources of support.

The information in this leaflet is based on clinical best practice, a consensus of opinion by dietitians within the CFDGUK and a consensus document on nutrition management of cystic fibrosis, which you can read here: cysticfibrosis.org.uk/publications.