

How to give medicines to children safely

This information sheet will help you when giving any medicine to an infant or child.

It is not a substitute for talking with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Read the label on the medicine bottle or container

This will tell you how much to give (the dose) and when. Ask your pharmacist if you are not sure.

Know the 'active ingredient'

Know what the 'active ingredient' is (what makes the medicine work) and what it is used for. For example, the active ingredient in Pamol is paracetamol.

The active ingredient may be used for more than one thing. Active ingredients can be in more than one medicine with different names. There can be more than one active ingredient in each medicine.

Don't accidentally double up!

Know your child's weight

The amount of medicine your child needs might be based on weight not age.

- When you get a medicine from a doctor or pharmacy, they will tell you how much to use.
- For medicines you buy in the supermarket, the amount to give your child is on the packaging.

If the amount to give is not clear, ask a health professional. Never guess the amount to give to your child.

The amount each child needs will change as they get older and will be different to their siblings.

How to calculate the dose of paracetamol or ibuprofen

Healthify has two calculators you can use to check the dose of paracetamol or ibuprofen for your child. You will need your child's weight and the strength of the medicine. You can find the strength of the medicine on the label or packaging, for example 120mg/5mL.

- healthify.nz/tools/p/paracetamol-dose-calculator
- healthify.nz/tools/i/ibuprofen-paediatric-dose-calculator

Check your child's dose before they need to take their medicine, at a time when you are not distracted.

Measure liquid medicines using an oral syringe, a measuring spoon or a measuring cup

Use the measuring device that comes with the medicine or ask your pharmacist for a measuring device.

Do NOT use ordinary spoons as they do not give the correct amount.

Examples of measuring devices for liquid medicines



Note: these images were AI-generated, and they are not to scale. The measuring device for your child's medicine may look different to these examples.

Keep track of the medicines given

Make sure you know what medicine has been given, when it was given and how much was given. Keeping a medicine diary for your child is a good idea, especially if they take multiple medicines, or more than one person is giving the medicines.

- Do not give more than the amount on the label.
- Do not give more often than it says on the label.

Always ask

If the medicine doesn't seem to be working, go back to your doctor.

If you are not sure about anything to do with your child's medicine, ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist or call Healthline on 0800 611 116 for help.

Store all medicines in a safe place, out of reach and sight of children.

Very few medicines need to be kept in the fridge. Check with your pharmacist.