

choking awareness

How to reduce the risk of choking

General advice to help someone take
medications when they have a choking risk



Ideas to consider to help reduce the risk of choking

- Ensure a person is upright, awake and alert before giving any medication
- Give one medication at a time, never rush the person and give them time to swallow
- Check that each tablet or capsule has been swallowed and is not sitting in the mouth
- If the person is having difficulty taking a whole tablet it may be possible to halve a tablet using a tablet cutter. It is important that tablet cutter is used for an individual person and never shared
- Patients with swallowing difficulties may find liquid preparations easier to take. Some medications can be prescribed as a liquid form, soluble tablets, powders or granules for suspension. A pharmacist can advise on availability and suitability. Advice should be sought from a pharmacist before any medication is altered
- For patients on thickened fluids some liquid medicines may have to be mixed with thickening agents when there is no suitable alternative. Before thickening liquid medication always seek advice from a pharmacist
- Patients on soft-food diets may be able to swallow crushed tablets or the contents of capsules given with cold soft food eg. a teaspoon of yoghurt or jam. Be aware that some medication can be bitter. Use a small amount of food to ensure the full dose is taken. Before crushing a tablet or opening a capsule seek advice from your pharmacist
- Ensure that you inform the person if you are giving them medicine in food. Medicines should only be administered in food with the patient's knowledge and consent. Hiding medication in food is considered 'covert administration' and is only allowed in certain circumstances
- Only crush medicines or open capsules one at a time. Do not mix all the patient's medicines together and only perform immediately before administration. For medicines that are suitable for crushing, crush using a pestle and mortar, a tablet crusher or between two metal spoons. Equipment used in the manipulation of tablets and capsules are for individual patients and devices should not be shared between individuals.
Cutting or crushing tablets, opening capsules or thickening medicines should only be carried out with consent from the prescriber and following advice from a pharmacist
- Always inform a health professional if a person has difficulty swallowing their medicines or experiences any unpleasant side-effects eg. dry mouth. A difficulty swallowing medication can be the sign of something that needs further medical assessment and treatment. The prescriber can review the medicines and consider if there is an alternate way to take the medication to improve swallowing and/or reduce side-effects.