Pediatrics: Dosing Medications Safely and Tips for OTC Treatment

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Liquid Medication and Pediatrics: Safety First

Giving medication to a sick child can be challenging for parents and caregivers. Doses are calculated based on a child’s age and/or weight. Because of this, infants and young children require small doses of medication. This makes accurate measurement of the dose important! When giving the medication, always read the instructions given with the medication. If the product is prescription, measure the exact dose as directed by your healthcare provider.

Which dosing device is best?

- Dosing cups are easy to use when administering medication.
- Use in older children
- Dosing errors can occur. Hence, this is not the most accurate and appropriate choice in infants and younger children.

Ask the Pharmacist

If your child refuses to take the medication because of bad taste, check with a pharmacist to see if the medication can be mixed with fruit juice, milk, or other liquid. The pharmacist may be able to flavor some medications to disguise the taste.

Dosing Cup

- Like dosing cups, dosing spoons are easy to use when administering medication.
- Use in older children
- It can be difficult to get the entire medication out of the spoon if the medication is a syrup or suspension.

Dosing Spoon
Tips for measuring over-the-counter liquid medications

- OTC liquids are more accurate when dosed based off of a child’s weight. Tables are provided on the product box to help appropriately dose the medication.
- If you are using dosing cups for measuring the liquid, always look at the cup from eye level and on a flat surface.
- Always ensure you are focused and not distracted when measuring the medication.
- Store the medicine and the dosing tool together to ensure that you will have the correct device when needed.
- Always check to make sure that the units on the cup (teaspoon, tablespoon, milliliter) match the units of the dose you want to give.
- If you have any questions or concerns about using the product for your child, ask your local pharmacist for help!

Important Fact

- Never measure liquid medications with household utensils for children!
- Household spoons and other utensils are not uniformly sized and can cause too much or too little medication to be dispensed.
- Giving too much medication can cause unwanted side effects!

Only use syringes when measuring medications for infants.
How do you administer liquid medications to infants?

1. Prepare the medication to be administered.
2. Open the infant’s mouth by gently squeezing his/her cheeks or by using your finger to pull out a corner of the infant’s mouth.
3. Slowly squirt the medication into the side of the infant’s mouth. Do not squirt medication into the back of the throat because this can cause the infant to gag or choke.
4. Gently stroke the infant under the chin to encourage swallowing while still holding their cheeks together.

Poison Ivy Parenting Tips

Poison Ivy: “Leaves of all three, let it be”

Poison Ivy is a common condition in the spring, summer, and fall seasons. After a child is exposed to poison ivy, a rash can develop from an allergic reaction. About 50-70% of people are sensitive to a chemical in the plant sap that causes the reaction. However, if someone is repeatedly exposed to poison ivy, they will eventually become sensitive. This rash will develop within several hours or days after contact with the plant. Along with the rash, symptoms of itching and formation of blisters can appear.

How to recognize Poison Ivy: Educate children to recognize and avoid the poisonous plant!

Poison Ivy has three pointed leaves that change colors with the season. It is red in spring, green in the summer, and yellow/orange in the fall.

Immediately seek medical attention and do not use OTC products without doctor supervision if:

- Child is 2 years old or under
- Child has a fever, trouble breathing, or swelling
- Itching interferes with sleep
- The rash covers most of their body
- Rash develops on face or genitals
- Rash is open and oozing
- Pus or soft yellow scabs are present
- Rash worsens or does not improve after 7 days
Symptoms of Poison Ivy

- Rash
- Blisters
- Itching

Treatment will help take care of the symptoms but does not cure the rash! The rash will usually go away in 2 weeks.

Prevention is key!

- Educate children to recognize and avoid poison ivy.
- Cover children up (shoes, long sleeves, long pants) if they are playing near an area that might have poison ivy.
- Wash skin and clothing with mild soap and water immediately after being outside.

Treatment

- Wash all clothes and shoes in soap and water immediately after exposed.
- Wash areas of skin that were exposed for at least 10 minutes with soap and water.
- Ensure the child does not scratch the infected site. This can cause an infection and make the rash worse.
- Take short lukewarm baths. Oatmeal bath preparations can be used to soothe the irritation. These can be found over-the-counter at the local pharmacy.
- Hydrocortisone cream can be used 2-4 times daily to dry weeping lesions and relieve itching. Apply a thin layer to the rash. Do not use over large areas of the body and for longer than 7 days.

Important Facts: Check the product label!!

- Avoid using topical products that contain antihistamines.
- If skin has blisters or open sores, too much of the antihistamine can be absorbed and cause side effects in children.
- Furthermore, antihistamines can sometimes aggravate a poison ivy rash and make it more uncomfortable for the child.

Topical Antihistamines found in products include diphenhydramine (Benadryl) and fexofenadine (Allegra)
Question: Can Melatonin be used in children?

About 10% of children have difficulty sleeping during the night. Pediatric insomnia typically results from neuropsychiatric disorders (autism, anxiety, depression), psychosocial problems as well as environmental changes (travel, hospitalizations). Melatonin, a dietary supplement, has been a commonly used over-the-counter product for insomnia in children. Melatonin is a natural hormone that is produced by the pineal gland. The production and release of melatonin is stimulated by darkness and inhibited by light. Hence, melatonin is associated with regulating the circadian rhythm and promoting sleep. Prior to trying over-the-counter treatment, including melatonin, good sleep hygiene should be practiced.

Who can use melatonin?

- It is encouraged to check with a pediatrician or family doctor prior to using natural supplements.
- Melatonin can be used short term (1-2 months) in children that are 10 years old and older.
- Do not use long term for treatment because safety has not been established for longer time periods.
- Common side effects include daytime drowsiness, headaches, and stomach upset.
- Take medication on an empty stomach. If child experiences stomach upset, they can take it with food.
- Recommended to start at the lowest dose (3 mg) 30-60 minutes before bedtime.

Good Sleep Hygiene

- Avoid caffeine and naps especially before bedtime.
- Provide an age appropriate sleep schedule.
- Encourage a routine: Have your child go to bed and get up in the morning at the same time.
- Discourage watching television or playing computer games 1 hour before bedtime.
- If child takes ADHD medications (stimulants such as Ritalin, Adderall), start taking medication in the morning to minimize insomnia.

Important Facts:

- Talk to physician before using melatonin in children less than 10 years old.
- Do not use melatonin for more than a few weeks without consulting a physician for long term use.

Tip: Do not use Benadryl (diphenhydramine) for insomnia in children. It can make their insomnia worse!
References


Pictures from:


