

Caring for Care Homes

Administration Dilemmas

It is very important that medicines are taken exactly as instructed to ensure that they work as intended. If instructions are not accurately followed, the medication may interact with another medication, and may cause side effects or even cause the condition to deteriorate. The advice below will help you to understand the importance of these warnings.

Medicines and Food

- **Before food or on an empty stomach**

Some medicines should be taken before food or on an empty stomach. This means an hour before, or two hours after, eating food. If these instructions are not accurately followed and there is food in the stomach, the medicine will not be absorbed into the bloodstream and may not work properly.

- **Take with or after food**

Some medicines should be taken with food or immediately after eating. The main reasons why medicines may need to be taken with or after food are:

- Some medicines may cause nausea or vomiting.

- Some medicines are irritants and may cause symptoms of indigestion.

- Medicines to treat conditions in the mouth or throat may need to be taken after eating as they can get washed away quickly during food consumption and the medicine may not work.

- Some medicines are absorbed better if there is food in the stomach.



It is therefore very important that care home staff are aware of these warnings and that administration times are altered accordingly.

Crushing tablets or opening capsules

Care homes should never attempt to crush a tablet or open a capsule without seeking advice from a relevant healthcare practitioner and ensuring that the prescriber is made aware that this will be happening. How to administer the medication should be clearly recorded in the patient's medication plan. A person administering crushed tablets or opened capsules to a resident, without directions from the prescriber and without making the appropriate checks, could be held liable for any harm caused.

Situations do arise where a resident is unable to swallow or has a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy tube (PEG). In these cases, the prescriber will decide the best possible action to be taken. Options may include:

- Temporarily or permanently stopping a medication
- Replacing a medicine with an alternative
- Investigating if a different formulation such as a liquid or a chewable tablet is available
- Crushing tablets or opening capsules may be advised (the resident must be aware of this at administration)

There are some tablets or capsules that must never be crushed or opened. These include:

- **Modified release preparations**
crushing will affect how the drug is released
- **Enteric coated**
the special coating no longer provides protection
- **Hormone, steroid, antibiotic or chemotherapy medicines**
due to risk of inhalation by the person crushing

In the majority of cases a liquid medicine will be available. However, these are often unlicensed products and will need to be specially manufactured. This can be very expensive (usually over £100 a bottle) and often products do not have a long shelf life, so it is important that the most appropriate formulation is considered.

Alcohol

Alcohol can interact with prescription medicines to produce unexpected results such as drowsiness, dizziness, weakness, and decreased coordination. This can increase the risk of falls. Alcohol may also increase or decrease the effectiveness of a medication by changing the way it is processed by the liver.



Missed doses

Missing a dose of medication may make the medicine less effective but taking doses too close together could increase the risk of side effects.

Delayed doses

If a dose is delayed by a short period of time then it may still be appropriate to administer the dose having checked with a relevant healthcare practitioner .