

Getting Children to take Supplements

By Lori Knowles-Jimenez



Parents seeking natural treatment options for children with developmental disabilities may be asked by their doctor to give them six or more nutritional supplements each day. This can be overwhelming to parents, especially when their children do not swallow pills and strongly resist being forced to consume anything that is not of their choosing.

High quality and effective multivitamin formulations designed for health-challenged kids will never taste ideal because of the amount and types of nutrients their bodies and brains require. The bottom line is that certain critical nutrients, such as a vitamin B-6, do not always taste good. Great tasting gummy vitamins you buy in the store might be easy to give, but they are full of sugar, chemicals, and have very low amounts of the important nutrients, and therefore, limited efficacy.

Below are some suggestions that have been tried and true to help overcome any resistance. Whether the supplements you are giving are in capsule, liquid, or chewable form, following these five steps should help with getting your child to comply.

1. **Take a No-Nonsense Approach.** Give supplements with the same level of intensity that you use to give them a life-saving medication. Your child needs these supplements if you want to see them make progress and this will demonstrate to them that it is not optional.
2. **Do not mix into food or drink and pretend that it's not there!** This only works if you are adding only one or two tasteless supplements. Even if they can't taste it, they may choose not to finish the drink or food that it's mixed into, and the child will not get the full benefit. As you need to add additional supplements to their regimen, hiding them in food will eventually backfire and they will become suspicious and reluctant to eat any foods that you give them.
3. **Choose the Best Method for your Child to Administer Supplements.** You need to take into effect the sensory/swallowing issues that your child has. Does your child do better with liquids or semi-solids? The two most common mediums in which to mix supplements are fruit purees or liquids.
 - a. *Fruit purees/baby food:* Favorite baby food fruit purees – such as peaches – helps mask the taste of many supplements – especially B vitamins. Pears and apple purees can also be good options. Using organic baby food or making your own is recommended due to the high levels of pesticide residues in these foods. Open up each capsule and mix it into the fruit puree of choice (1-2 tbsp). Add one drop of pure stevia liquid to sweeten and additionally mask the supplement taste, if needed.

- b. *Liquids*: For children who have a problem with the taste and texture of fruit purees, use a tart or strong juice and pour a small amount (1-2 tbsp) into a bowl. Open up and empty supplement capsules into the bowl and mix well by stirring to dissolve as much as possible. While the mixture is still swirling, use a large syringe to suck up the supplement mixture. If possible, use only enough liquid to fill one syringe or two at the most. Some examples of juices/liquids that parents are using to mix in supplements include pear, pineapple, orange, grape, cranberry, chocolate flavored milk substitute, water, or a small amount of a favorite natural soda. Remember to only use the liquid of choice for giving supplements, not for regular drinks in order to avoid confusion.

Remember that the choice of liquids or purees used should be based upon *your* child's issues which need to take into consideration for any allergies, phenol sensitivities, and sensitivity to sugar.

4. **Use the Concept of "First - Then"**. This is a critical concept to ensure compliance. For children with special needs, this concept can be learned by repeating it in everyday life experiences. (i.e., first, we turn on the water, then we wash our hands). Even a very young child can learn this concept if it's repeated enough. Once this concept is understood, it will help ensure success with these next two compliance steps.
 - a. *Encourage compliance with a reward*: Praise, high-fives and hugs may be all the motivation some children need but the majority may require additional incentives. This can be any type of reward that is given immediately after - and positively associated with - taking the supplements. However, choosing an edible reward (which they love and only given during these times) helps erase any lingering bad taste in their mouth. Good tasting buffered chewable vitamin C, special fruit juice or other healthy low sugar options that they don't get regularly are good choices. Show them your chosen reward and tell them "**FIRST** you take your vitamins, and **THEN** you can have this special "candy" or drink."
 - b. *Encourage compliance with a consequence*: If they still refuse or spit it out, always react calmly with a well thought out consequence. Choose a favorite activity of theirs (watching videos/TV, favorite toy or activity, etc.), for the purpose of withholding it until the child takes the supplements successfully. For example: "Do you want to play on your iPad? **FIRST** you must take your vitamins, **THEN** you can (play with your iPad). Switch off the TV or take the favorite toy until they comply. It is important to NOT give in to ensure success! Never make it a power struggle or plead with them. Just remind the child that if they make the right choice, they can get what they want.
5. **Be consistent and firm**. If you are firm and do not give in to the conditions you set down for your child, most children will start to comply within 2-3 days because they learn they cannot win the battle. Wait them out for as long as you need to, and when they FINALLY give in and take the supplements, quickly give them praise, the small reward that is given every time they successfully take their supplements and preferred toy or activity that was being withheld.

This consistent, firm but positive approach will ensure your success in getting any important nutritional supplement or medicine into your child.