

# Choosing medicines for patients unable to take solid oral dosage forms

Select suitable formulations for adult patients with swallowing difficulties or feeding tubes.

A stepwise approach is suggested:

## STEP 1

### Use a licensed medicine in a suitable formulation.

For example:

- Licensed liquid preparation
- Soluble tablets
- Powders or granules for suspension

In order to use a licensed medicine, consider switching to a different route of administration or *when clinically appropriate* to a different agent in the same class, or to a different medicine.

For example, consider:

- Fluoxetine liquid (licensed preparation) as an alternative to sertraline tablets.
- Aspirin dispersible tablets instead of clopidogrel tablets.
- HRT Patches instead of tablets

### Is it needed?

**If the patient is taking medicines that aren't needed or aren't working, stop or change them!**

Only prescribe special-order medicines if there is **no suitable licensed medicine** available that meets the patient's needs. It may be appropriate to use a licensed medicine in an unlicensed way e.g. crushing the tablets.

## Why licensed status matters

To be granted a licence a medicine must meet quality standards and be shown to be safe and effective. Licensed medicines usually come with a patient information leaflet and are considered the safest choice.

**Special-order medicines are unlicensed** and are not required to meet the same standards as licensed medicines. **Prescribers take greater responsibility when using them.**

## STEP 2

### Consider using a licensed medicine in an unlicensed manner, for example by crushing / dispersing tablets in water or by opening capsules. Check with medicines information before hand

For example:

- Clindamycin capsules can be opened and the contents mixed with water.
- Bendroflumethiazide tablets can be dispersed in water.

Both the above examples are suitable for administration orally or via a feeding tube.

Not all medicines are suitable for administration in this way and it is important to check beforehand. See over for where to get advice.

As before, consider switching to a different agent or route of administration in order to use a licensed product.

**Care staff may only give licensed medicines in an unlicensed way on the instructions of the prescriber.**

**A written direction to crush or disperse tablets or to open capsules must be documented in the patient's care plan.**

*In most cases a licensed preparation (used off-licence) will be available that meets the patient's needs.*

## Cost Effectiveness

Special-order medicines ("specials") are often considerably **more expensive** than licensed medicines. They may have **short shelf-lives** compared with licensed alternatives and **may need fridge storage**.

**For example, bendroflumethiazide liquid is 40 times more expensive than tablets:**

- 30 doses of 2.5mg tablets cost 53p.
- 30 doses of 2.5mg/5ml liquid (150ml) costs approximately £21.

NB: Bendroflumethiazide tablets can be dispersed in water for administration orally or via feeding tubes.

To reduce waste, consider dose, volume and bottle size and **only prescribe enough medicine to last until the expiry**.

## STEP 3

### In the few situations where there is no licensed option, consider using a 'special'.

Special-order ('special') liquid medicines are **unlicensed and expensive**. They should only be used if there is no licensed medicine that meets the patient's needs.

**Licensed medicines should be used where possible. Special-order medicines are unlicensed and expensive and should only be used if there is no licensed alternative.**

Name of Unlicensed Medicine also referred to as "Special"	Alternative Formulation and Administration Advice
Bendroflumethiazide Liq 2.5mg/5mL	Tablets disperse readily in water
Betahistine Oral Suspension 8mg/5ml	The tablets can be crushed and mixed with water for administration. The drug is very soluble
Flecainide Oral Suspension 25mg/5ml; 10mg/5ml	The tablets can be crushed and dispersed in de-ionised water for administration (e.g. water for injection, water for irrigation).
Hydrocortisone Oral Suspension 10mg/5ml; 5mg/5ml	The standard-release tablets are insoluble but will disperse in water within one minute
Hydroxycarbamide Oral suspension 500mg/5ml	The capsules / tablets are cytotoxic and should not be opened except on Pharmacy advice. Please note that Children as young as 5 years old can be taught how to swallow tablets / capsules.
Lisinopril oral solution 20mg/5mL	Tablets will disperse in water
Melatonin Oral Solution/Suspension 2mg/5ml; 2.5mg/5ml; 5mg/5ml	The standard capsules can be opened and the contents mixed with water, milk, yogurt or fruit juice for administration
Methylphenidate Oral Suspension 5mg/5ml	The modified-release capsules (Equasym® XL and Medikinet® XL brands) can be opened and the contents sprinkled onto a small amount of apple sauce or yoghurt and taken immediately. The contents should not be chewed or crushed. OR Use the standard tablets. Crush and mix with water.
Omeprazole Liq 2.5mg/5mL, 5mg/5mL, 10mg/5mL, 20mg/5mL, 40mg/5mL	Disperse Omeprazole MUPS in water then mix with juice or yoghurt. Consider using Lansoprazole Fastabs
Pyridostigmine Oral Suspension 20mg/5ml	The tablets can be crushed and mixed with water
Sertraline Oral Suspension 50mg/5ml; 100mg/5ml	The tablets can be crushed and mixed with water
Spironolactone oral suspension 5mg/5mL, 10mg/5mL, 25mg/5mL, 50mg/5mL 100mg/5mL	Tablets can be crushed and mixed with water
Topiramate oral liq 25mg/5mL	Consider using sprinkle capsules and sprinkle contents on soft food; The tablets can be crushed and dispersed in water
Zopiclone oral liq 3.75mg/5mL	Consider using Temazepam Oral Solution 10mg/5mL

**Always check beforehand if a tablet is suitable for dispersing / crushing, or a capsule is suitable for opening.**

## Where can I get advice?

For advice on choosing appropriate dosage forms or to check if tablets or capsules can be dispersed, crushed or opened, please ask your Practice Pharmacist / Medicines Management Technician or the Pharmaceutical Advisers on **01908 278744**.

## Consider the patient's method of feeding:

Patients on liquid feeds may take oral liquid medicines, dispersible tablets or solid preparations dispersed in water prior to administration.

For patients on thickened fluids, liquid medicines can usually be mixed with products like **Nutilis Clear**.

Patients on soft-food diets may be able to swallow crushed tablets or the contents of capsules given with food.

Patients with enteral feeding tubes may have oral medicines given by this route.

**Contact Nikki Woodhall at [nikki.woodhall@nhs.net](mailto:nikki.woodhall@nhs.net) if you would like a list of specials your practice has prescribed!**

### References:

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