



Giving Oral Medications to Your Dog

This information is not meant to be a substitute for veterinary care. Always follow the instructions provided by your veterinarian.

In the photographs below, the dog's nose is pointed to your right.

Variations on these instructions exist.

Your veterinarian will tell you if your dog's medication(s) can be given with food or if it must be given on an empty stomach. If the tablet or capsule can be given with food, you may make a "meatball" by placing the medication in the center of a small ball of canned dog food or cheese.

Always give a test "meatball" to your dog to make sure she is willing eat it and also to see if she chews it or gulps it whole. Dogs are more likely to gulp the "meatball" without chewing. If they do chew the "meatball" and spit out the pill, the tablet or capsule will partially dissolve and become very hard to handle. If the dog bites into the tablet or capsule, which will leave a bad taste in her mouth, she will be harder to medicate on the second attempt. So, you will have to decide what works best with your dog.

The following instructions are presented to help you give medications if you cannot give the medicine in a "meatball". Use caution when giving a dog oral medication to avoid a bite. A dog's mouth contains many bacteria. If your dog bites you, clean the wound thoroughly and seek medical attention immediately.



Medications for oral administration may be in pill, capsule or liquid form.

This client information sheet is based on material written by Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine



Hold the dog's head from the top using your left hand if you are right-handed. If the dog has a long nose hold the upper jaw between thumb and index finger. If the dog has a short nose, hold the head like a cat (see handout on giving oral medications to a cat).



Tilt the head back. Dogs have stronger jaw muscles than cats and unlike the cat, the lower jaw does not usually drop open far enough to place the pill or capsule over the base of the tongue.



Gently fold the upper lip over the teeth as you open the mouth. If the dog bites down with your hand in her mouth, she will bite her lip and will not bite your hand. Place your thumb on the roof of the dog's mouth. You do not have to fold the dog's lip over their teeth but this does reduce the chance of you being bit.



Hold the pill or capsule in your right hand between your thumb and index finger. Use the middle finger of your right hand to pull open the lower jaw. Keep your middle finger over the small incisor teeth NOT over the sharp fangs (canine teeth).



Drop the pill or capsule as far back over the tongue as possible, then immediately close the mouth and blow on the dog's nose which will encourage her to swallow.



If you are unable to get the pill far enough over the base of the tongue, the dog will spit it out. You may need to use your index finger and thumb to push the pill over the back of the tongue.

IMPORTANT: If you use your thumb and index finger to push the pill over the base of the tongue, your fingers will be inside the dog's mouth and you must work rapidly to avoid getting bit.

Close the mouth and stroke the dog's neck or blow sharply on his/her nose to encourage the dog to swallow.

Notice the dog's lip is still folded over the upper teeth to protect the hand from being bitten.

There are several styles of pilling devices that can be used to place a pill or capsule over the base of the tongue so that you do not have to place your fingers in the dog's mouth. See handout on [pilling a cat](#) for details.

If you find it difficult to give your dog a pill or capsule, speak to your veterinarian about suspending the pill or capsule in a liquid. Some medications can be suspended in liquid while others lose their effectiveness when placed in a suspension. Always talk to your veterinarian before altering the medication.



Liquid medications are given in a pouch between the teeth and cheek.



The medication is quickly squirted into this pouch, the mouth is held closed and the neck stroked or the nose sharply blown on to encourage the dog to swallow.

Liquids are more likely to accidentally enter the windpipe compared to pills or capsules. To avoid the dog inhaling liquid into the windpipe, DO NOT tilt the dog's head backward.