Introduction & Disclaimer

For children on the Autistic Spectrum, pill-swallowing can be a frightening experience. At times, these children require 'extra steps' to break down a new routine in order to make them feel secure, decrease their anxiety and help them motor plan the information needed to have a safe pill-swallowing experience.

The Oralflo cup can relieve the anxiety associated with pill-swallowing allowing your child to swallow medications or vitamins easily, safely and in a time-efficient manner. The revolutionary design of this cup will assist your child’s swallowing reflex by permitting pills to flow in a stream of water rather than requiring them to hold a pill stationary in their mouth, which may cause gagging and pill refusal.

To promote a positive experience using the Oralflo cup, we have put in place a sequence of steps in this protocol specifically for children on the Autistic Spectrum. There may be situations where additional steps might be indicated in order to better serve your child’s particular needs. Conversely, you may be able to skip several steps, using the protocol as a guideline to assess your starting point as you consider your child’s specific strengths and weaknesses. As we know all too well, the diagnosis of Autism means there are a spectrum of skills and strengths and we, as parents and therapists, just need to find them. The basis of this protocol is to establish a hierarchy in order to find that skill and expand it in order to get the lifesaving medications these children require into their bodies safely.

We recommend your child be at least 4 years old before teaching them to swallow pills using the Oralflo cup. You should consult with your physician regarding pill-swallowing with your child. Moreover, Mung beans are used in this protocol since they are not usually considered a highly allergenic food, although we recommend also discussing this with your child's doctor and/or nutritionist before introducing them to your child for the first time. The information provided in this protocol should not replace seeking medical advice from your doctor.
Purpose & Methods

Out of the many children we have taught to swallow their medication, the group that faces the most challenges with pill-swallowing are children on the autistic spectrum. Parents who were using the Oralflo cup and following directions designed for neuro-typical children could not attain even preliminary swallowing milestones from their child with autism. As a result, they were returning the cup, not using the cup and telling other parents that the Oralflo cup did not work for children with Autism.

This protocol was developed after teaching hundreds of children with a variety of disorders, including Autism, how to swallow their medication. Some children had motor impairments, some had sensory impairments, others could not follow directions independently, some could not visually process how to use the cup and others could not handle the overall psychological pressure of pill swallowing.

It is through this clinical experience that the effectiveness of the Oralflo cup has been measured. During our therapy sessions, great success with the Oralflo cup was achieved due to the fact that a trained professional was teaching the child how to use the cup with multiple steps. Additionally, the success was continued in homes of children whose parents attended therapy sessions for carry-over education.

The length of time for successful pill-swallowing for a child on the autistic spectrum using this protocol depends on (1) the child and their unique abilities/disabilities, (2) parent follow-through, and (3) a calm and supportive environment.

Preparation & Materials

Preparation

- Discourage drinking two hours before introducing any part of the protocol to your child. This will encourage the sensation of thirst and allow for a more successful pill-swallowing session, as your child will be drinking during the administration of the protocol.

- Encourage your child to use the restroom, change their diaper, etc. in order to prevent interruptions and control issues (hoarding of bowel or bladder) associated with drinking and swallowing.

- Encourage consistent oral care/teeth brushing twice a day to ensure that bacteria are less likely to contaminate your child’s oral secretions. Reduced bacteria and healthy oral secretions support a child’s willingness to drink.
• Throughout this protocol, you will be introducing and repeating these two phrases: “Nice drinking!” and “Good swallowing!” in order to increase the carryover of your child’s understanding of the process.

  o For us, telling a child to “drink” means to: (1) take water into their mouth and then swallow it or (2) swallow the contents that are in their cup. For our kids on the spectrum, telling them to “drink” may indicate to them that they need to put the cup to their mouth, but this doesn’t insure that they intend to swallow it or that they even understand that you want them to swallow it. Thus, we need to teach the child the difference between drinking and swallowing. If Johnny is taking a drink from his cup, tell him “nice drinking!” When he swallows the liquid say: “good swallowing!”

  o For those children who chew their pills, we also need to teach them the difference between chewing and swallowing. Clinically, the use of Mung beans in this protocol has assisted children who chew their pills, begin swallowing pills whole.

• After reading this entire protocol and before implementing it, please remember to make all pill-swallowing experiences as positive as possible. If at any point your child demonstrates anxiety, reassure them and then have fun re-exploring the protocol at the previous step. It is important to set up the environment as an opportunity for you and your child to learn about pill-swallowing and to have fun together! For example, playing with the cup could constitute a victorious session! Each step along the way is a success and should be celebrated!

Materials

The materials needed for this protocol are:

• The Oralflo cup: Clean the cup with soap and water and rinse it thoroughly. In our clinical experience, several children have told us that they can smell and taste soap in plastic containers, which is why they refuse to drink. Please note: Tilting your head back beyond a small degree during a swallow opens your airway and places you at risk for aspiration (the entry of foreign material into the lungs including secretions, liquids, pills, food, etc.) The angled mouthpiece extension of the Oralflo cup is a safety feature that allows your child to swallow without having to tilt their head back to an unsafe position.

• Water: Use good tasting water to encourage drinking. Several clients have told us they refuse to drink water and insist on drinking juice because the water tastes bad. Find a water source your child will drink (tap water, filtered water, smart water, bottled water, distilled water, ph balanced water, etc.)

• Mung Beans: You can find these at a local grocery store. (In confirming with nutritionists and physicians, they assure us that swallowing a Mung bean does not negatively impact the digestion process.)

• Pills: Have all your child’s pills available and ready in case your child thinks using the Oralflo cup is fun and wants to keep drinking! However, for some children, seeing all the pills may cause anxiety, so keep them close but out of sight. Please note: Some gelatin capsules may stick in the Oralflo cup when the lid is wet. To avoid capsules from sticking, please ensure the spout of your Oralflo cup is dry before administration of gelatin capsules or talk with your pharmacist about compounding the medication into gelatin capsule alternatives.
The Protocol

These steps are meant to guide your child from step 1 to step 15 and stopping once your child has successfully swallowed one pill. Stopping at this point will help end the pill-swallowing experience on a positive and successful attempt. The next pill-swallowing session would then start at step 16.

Introduce Cup

1. Have your child tolerate the Oralflo cup at the table with the lid off and placed out of sight. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for allowing the new cup at the table.

2. Have your child touch and play with the Oralflo cup at the table with the lid off and placed out of sight. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for playing with the cup at the table.

3. Have your child blow on or kiss the Oralflo cup with the lid off and out of sight. (Anything will count if your child brings the cup toward his/her lips.) Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for blowing or kissing the cup.

4. Have your child fill up the Oralflo cup (with the lid off and out of sight) with water and then give the water to you. Promptly take a sip of the water with energetic eagerness to model how to drink from this new cup. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for giving you the cup of water.

5. Have your child fill up the Oralflo cup and take a small sip of water with the lid off and out of sight. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for taking a sip of water. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

6. Have your child drink several sips of water from the Oralflo cup with the lid off and out of sight. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for your child taking several sips of water. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

Introduce Lid

7. Have your child drink several sips of water from the Oralflo cup and introduce the lid by placing the lid on the table. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for allowing the lid at the table.

8. Have your child drink several sips of water from the Oralflo cup. Once the child is done drinking from the cup, demonstrate how the lid goes onto the cup. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for allowing the lid on the cup.

9. Have your child touch and play with the Oralflo cup, putting the lid on and off. Then have your child take off the lid and drink several sips of water from the Oralflo cup. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for playing with the lid.

10. Have your child touch and play with the Oralflo cup, putting the lid on and off. Then have your child take off the lid and drink several sips of water from the Oralflo cup. Then, have your child return the lid back on the cup and put the cup away. (From this step forward, the lid will remain on the cup when taking out the cup and putting it away.) Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for putting the lid on and putting the cup away.
11. Have your child blow or kiss the Oralflo cup with the lid on. (Anything will count if your child brings the cup toward his/her lips.) Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for **putting the cup to his/her lips**.

12. Have your child take a small sip of water from the Oralflo cup with the lid on. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for **drinking a sip of water with the lid on**. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

13. Have your child drink several sips of water from the Oralflo cup with the lid on. Give lots of encouragement and verbal praise for **drinking several sips of water with the lid on**. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

**Introduce Pills**

14. To increase trust in the pill-swallowing relationship, have your child put a small Mung Bean in the Oralflo cup. The small green bean should stay in the Oralflo spout. Have your child see that this bean will stay in the spout. Have your child take a drink and swallow the bean. Give lots of encouragement and praise for **swallowing the water and the bean**. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

15. Have your child put a small Mung Bean in the Oralflo cup. Have your child see that this bean will stay in the spout. Have your child take a drink and swallow the bean. Then, have your child put their **smallest pill** (out of the variety of pills they need to take) in the Oralflo cup. Have your child see that this pill will stay in the spout. Have your child take a drink and swallow the pill. **(At this step, only swallow one pill and then stop.)** Give lots of encouragement and praise for **swallowing the water and the pill**. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

16. Have your child put their **smallest pill** in the Oralflo cup. Have your child see that this pill will stay in the spout. Have your child take a drink and swallow the pill. Repeat the process using the **next largest pill** in the Oralflo cup. Have your child see that this pill will also stay in the spout. Have your child take a drink and swallow the pill. **(At this step, only swallow two pills and then stop.)** Give lots of encouragement and praise for **swallowing the water and the pills**. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

17. Again, have your child put their **smallest pill** in the Oralflo cup. Have your child see that this pill will stay in the spout. Have your child take a drink and swallow the pill. Repeat the process using the **next largest pill** in the Oralflo cup. Have your child see that this pill will also stay in the spout. Have your child take a drink and swallow the pill. Continue repeating the process with each **incrementally larger pill**, taking it slow and stopping to take a rest if indicated (tired, frustrated, bored, difficulty swallowing, etc). **Parental judgment at this point will determine how many additional pills are advisable at this particular session. Continue this step at subsequent sessions until the child has swallowed all the required pills for that day.** Give lots of encouragement and praise for **swallowing the water and all the pills**. “Nice drinking!” and “good swallowing!”

- Congratulations you have completed the protocol! 😊
Additional Tips & Information

Due to the fact that the majority of clients we see are on a specialized diet (Gluten-Free Casein-Free, Specific Carbohydrate, no soy, no dyes, no sugar, no yeast, no corn, etc.), we have chosen to use Mung beans rather than tictacks, jellybeans or other sugar-based ingredients that are usually used in the teaching of pill-swallowing.  Mung beans are not commonly considered a highly allergenic food and generally these other products include ingredients such as: sugar, high fructose corn syrup, dyes and aspartame. Therefore, we advise avoiding these other products as much as possible.

a. The use of a mirror may help provide visual cues during the pill-swallowing experience.

b. You can use a visual-schedule to provide your child with visual cues for using the Oralflo cup. Go to www.SpectrumSpeech.com for ordering information regarding pictures for your pill-swallowing visual-schedule.

From the Author

I have had the blessing of working with children with pill-swallowing difficulties for over 15 years and it gives me great pleasure to assist you and your child through this process. It takes special dedication and perseverance for parents to work through such a demanding protocol. I appreciate your devotion to your child and their overall medical health. This is a huge accomplishment and I congratulate you on a job well done! May your future pill-swallowing experiences be equally successful and rewarding!

- Dawn Winkelmann, M.S., CCC-SLP

Please direct questions to Dawn@Oralflo.com or visit her website at www.SpectrumSpeech.com