

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 agent in the same class, or to a different route of administration.

For example, consider:

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

Use a licensed medicine in an unlicensed manner, for example by crushing / dispersing tablets in water or by opening capsules.

For example:

- Ramipril 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 will be available that meets the patient's needs.

Cost

Special-order medicines 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 75 times more expensive than tablets:

- 28 doses of 2.5mg tablets costs 80p.
- 30 doses of 2.5mg/5ml liquid (150ml) costs £60.

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

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.

Unlicensed Medicine Name	Formulation and administration advice / Alternative	Avg. Cost per script issued for Unlicensed Medicine	Potential Cost savings*
Amitriptyline Liq Spec 10mg/5mL	Use licensed preparations – Amitriptyline Oral Solution 50mg/5mL or 25mg/5mL	£228 for 100mLs	£213
Amlodipine Liq Spec 5mg/5mL	Tablets will disperse in water – give immediately as light sensitive.	£231 for 100mLs	£229
Bendroflumethiazide Liq Spec 2.5mg/5mL	Tablets disperse readily in water	£207 for 100mLs	£206
Captopril Liq Spec 5mg/5mL	Tablets will disperse in water	£483 for 285mLs	£479
Clobazam Liq Spec 5mg/5mL	Tablets can be dispersed in water - Unpleasant taste	£361 for 400mLs	£351
Dipyridamole Liq Spec 100mg/5mL	Use licensed preparation – Dipyridamole Oral Susp 50mg/5mL. For MR Capsules – open & sprinkle contents onto soft food. swallow whole, do not chew	£1,236 for 900mLs	£1,011
Lisinopril Liq Spec 5mg/5mL	Tablets will disperse in water	£345 for 600mLs	£342
Lorazepam Liq Spec 500mcg/5mL	Crush tablets, mix with water and administer	£219 for 30mLs	£212
Omeprazole Liq spec 10mg/5mL	Disperse Omeprazole MUPS in water then mix with juice or yoghurt. Consider using Lansoprazole Fastabs	£253 for 60mLs	£245
Ramipril Liq spec 10mg/5mL	Open capsules and disperse contents in water before taking	£205 for 100mLs	£203
Simvastatin Liq spec 20mg/5mL	Crush tablets, mix with water and administer	£459 for 300mLs	£456
Spiroonolactone Liq Spec 25mg/5mL	Tablets can be crushed and mixed with water	£224 for 125mLs	£222
Topiramate Liq Spec 50mg/5mL	Consider using sprinkle capsules and sprinkle contents on soft food	£382 for 300mLs	£344
Zopiclone Liq Spec 3.75mg/5mL	Consider using Temazepam Oral Solution 10mg/5mL	£190 for 200mLs	£172

* **Based on alternative option given!**

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 278708**.

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 **Thick and Easy**.

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 by email if you would like a list of specials your practice has prescribed!

References:

- UKMi. Medicines Q&A 294.1a: Therapeutic options for patients unable to take solid oral dosage forms. December 2009 (partial revision January 2010). Available online at: www.nelm.nhs.uk/en/NeLM-Area/Evidence/Medicines-Q--A/Therapeutic-options-for-patients-unable-to-take-solid-oral-dosage-forms/
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- Smyth J. The NEWT Guidelines for administration of medication to patients with enteral feeding tubes or swallowing difficulties. Wrexham: North East Wales NHS Trust; 2006.

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