

CRUSHING TABLETS OR OPENING CAPSULES IN A CARE HOME SETTING

Summary

In the first instance consider **how essential** the medication is and whether **alternative formulations** (e.g. liquids, patches or sublingual tablets) or medications can be used.

Before a person crushes or opens a medication, a **pharmacist** should always be **consulted** to find out if this is possible and this should be **approved** by the prescriber and documented in patient records.

There are some tablets and capsules that should **never be crushed or opened** such as **enteric coated, modified release preparations, hormone, steroid, antibiotic or chemotherapy (cytotoxic)** medicines without appropriate advice from a pharmacist.

Liquid medicines ordered from special manufacturers are unlicensed and often very expensive.

Additional patient monitoring may be required which the pharmacist will advise on.

Guidance

Tablets and capsules are the most commonly prescribed formulation of medicine. However, some care home residents may have difficulties with swallowing and so cannot use tablets or capsules in their whole solid form. In these circumstances decisions have to be made about whether the **medication needs to be continued or if there is an alternative treatment available.**

Prescription medications should only be taken according to the directions of a prescriber. **Medicines used in a different way from what the manufacturers have stated are being used off-licence which means the manufacturer does not accept responsibility for any harm caused by taking medicine in this way.**

What issues need to be considered before medicine is administered off-label in a care home setting?

Prescription medicines should ALWAYS be taken according to the directions of the prescriber. A person giving crushed tablets or opened capsules to a patient without directions from the prescriber and without making the appropriate checks could be held liable for any harm caused. In certain circumstances tablets may need to be crushed or capsules opened but crushing a tablet or removing powder or granules from a capsule might affect the way a medicines works and may even cause side effects.

Therefore before doing this the following options should be considered by the prescriber

- **Is the medication essential?**
- **Why are you crushing the tablets?** If it is due to a swallowing problem, then the resident may need a Speech and Language assessment. Check with the GP.

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Good Practice Guidance documents are believed to accurately reflect the literature at the time of writing. However, users should always consult the literature and take account of new developments because these may affect this guidance

- GP/Pharmacist should consider if an **alternative licensed formulation** is available (for example liquid).
- In some cases a **different** medicine can be prescribed that does not need to be swallowed whole.
- Before a person crushes tablets or opens capsules to administer to a resident, a **pharmacist** should be consulted to find out if this is possible and this should be approved by the **prescriber**.

There are some tablets and capsules that may be harmful if crushed or opened

- **Modified release (slow or extended release) tablets or capsules** (crushing will affect how the medication is released).
- **Enteric coated** tablets or capsules (as special coating will no longer provide protection).
- **Film coated preparations** (if coating is there to mask the taste, the tablet may be unpalatable once crushed).
- **Hormone, steroid, antibiotic or chemotherapy** (cytotoxic) medicines (due to risk of inhalation). In addition several drug substances may also cause irritation if the powder is aerosolised and inhaled or comes into contact with the eyes, skin, or other mucous membranes.

Consent

- Where the resident **has the capacity** to understand the issues of using medicines off-label (e.g. crushing tablets or opening capsules, they should have the situation explained to them by the prescriber **and must give their consent**. Written consent is not required, but the prescriber would record the consent within their clinical records. A record should also be made in the resident's care home record.
- It is necessary to distinguish between the concealing of medication in food or drink, and a co-operative process with a resident who finds swallowing medications difficult. If medication is added to food, this is outside the product licence and consent must be obtained from the resident and documented in the care home records. A pharmacist should be consulted to find out if this is possible and this should be approved by the prescriber.
- If a resident has the capacity to refuse medical treatment then this decision must be respected, and covert administration of medication would be unlawful.

Useful contacts

East and North Hertfordshire CCG Care Home Pharmacy Team
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East and North
Hertfordshire
Clinical Commissioning Group

Administration

Crushing Tablets

- Before crushing tablets, check if they can **dissolve or disperse** in water.
- Cutting a tablet that is **scored** is fine to do to aid swallowing.
- Crush tablets using a **suitable device** e.g. a **tablet crusher** and not a plastic container (as medication may stick to the plastic). Transfer into a medicine cup/pot.
- **Mix well with 15 – 30ml** water and administer to the patient.
- **Rinse** the device with water and **administer** this also.
- Only **one tablet should be crushed** at a time. **Each** resident should have **one crusher** and not shared between residents.
- Tablets should be crushed or dispersed **just before** administration.
- **Boiling water should not be used** to dissolve or disperse medications.

Opening capsules

- **Gently ease open** the capsule to release its contents into a medicine cup/pot.
- **Mix with 15 – 30ml** water and administer to the patient.
- **Rinse** the medicine cup/pot with water and **administer** this also.

Recording

The crushing of the tablet or opening of the capsule **must be clearly written** on the directions on the **Medication Administration Record (MARs)** chart as well as documented in the **care plan**.

Limitations

This document does NOT consider

- **Covert administration** or
- **Administration of medications via feeding tubes** - advice must be sought from the **pharmacist or prescriber** to avoid blockages, interactions with feeds and increased or decreased drug concentration levels.

This document gives general guidance only and a pharmacist should be consulted for drug specific advice.

References

- UK Medicines Information (UKMi) Medicines Q&As document "Crushing UK Medicines Information (UKMi) Medicines Q&As document "Crushing tablets or opening capsules in a care home setting". Date prepared: 1st December 2016.

Adapted from Herts Valleys CCG

- Crushing Tablets or Opening Capsules in a Care Home Setting, January 2017.
- Guidance for Swallowing Difficulties/Feeding Tubes, v3.

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