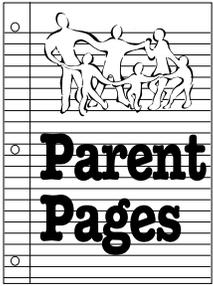


Staying Sane When Kids are Sick



Being a parent is a tough job at any time, but, when children are sick, the stresses on families can become almost unbearable. The words, "Give them this medication four times a day. Keep them as quiet as possible and see that they drink plenty of liquids." from a doctor can strike terror in the heart of a busy parent. The following suggestions are offered in the hope of easing some of the tensions that may arise when young children are sick at home.

"Give him this medication four times a day"

Most medicine today is flavored so young children will not object to the taste. Illness can make the most reasonable child balky, however. There is a silly but often effective game you can try if that happens.

Line up the child's collection of stuffed animals, trucks or books. Measure the medicine into a doll's teacup, an egg cup or a plastic coffee scoop and offer it to each plaything. Say, "Here's a taste of medicine for the brown teddy. Here's one for the blue truck. Here's one for the alphabet book," with a pleasant and hypnotic voice. Don't look at the child until you sense he has relaxed and become

absorbed in the game. Sometimes you will get suggestions -- "Give some to the clock, the telephone, etc." Gradually move closer to the child saying, "Here's some for your foot, some for your knee, some for your tummy, some for your chin, some for your mouth." Chances are good that, if you have been relaxed and cheerful, the child at that point will open up and swallow the stuff. If not, very casually and pleasantly begin again.

Another trick, for a child over three years old, is to explain that sucking on ice cubes or eating a teaspoon of peanut butter before taking medicine will almost certainly hide any unpleasant taste. Pills can be coated with peanut butter (except for children with peanut allergies) or, for a child who worries about being able to swallow pills, you can make play pills out of little pieces of bread. The child can use these to practice swallowing pills before trying the real ones.

As a last resort, and if your doctor has no better advice, you can wrap the child in a large towel, binding his arms to his side, hold his nose, and slip the medicine in when he opens his mouth to breath. This is a dirty trick and hopefully you will invent a more pleasant method, but the medicine must get down, and sometimes a quick, forceful solution is preferable to a dragged-out session of tears, threats and mutual exhaustion.

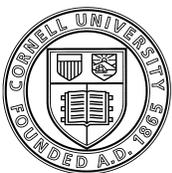


"Keep him as quiet as possible"

This does not always mean the child must stay in bed. Be sure you understand what the doctor means. If bed rest is required, here are some hints to make it more workable. Replace the child's bedspread with a large beach towel. Cleaning up if the child vomits or spills will be easier. Put some extra towels, rags or paper towels within reach of the bed for quick clean-ups. An ironing board is a good bedside table for a sick child. Some ironing boards can be adjusted across the bed as a table for meals, coloring, or puzzles.

Arrange a comfortable place for yourself where the sick child can see you. Plan to do quiet things yourself when not occupied with the patient - read, iron, sew, knit, write letters or just sit still and relax. If you engage in quiet activities and stay within sight, the child will find it easier to stay quietly in bed.

~Continued~



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You will probably have to spend more time playing, reading and singing with a sick child than a healthy one. You don't, however, have to become a slave to the patient. Perhaps you can work out a schedule with the child by drawing pictures of what the clock will look like when certain activities will occur.

Activities that work for young children in bed:

- ◆ Reading, looking at books, story-telling, talking about life "in the olden days when you were little."
- ◆ Singing any kind of song you know, but especially lullabies. It does not matter if you can't carry a tune.
- ◆ Looking at or working on snapshot albums or baby books together.
- ◆ Playing with hand puppets.
- ◆ Coloring, cutting up old magazines, doing puzzles, gluing. It may help to put a towel under all this work so the little bits of paper or drops of glue can be gathered up easily at the end.
- ◆ Having a back rub with special talc or hand lotion or with just plain cornstarch.
- ◆ "Helping" sort through and put in order a box of junk jewelry.
- ◆ Practicing shoe lacing, or stringing macaroni or cereal on a shoelace.
- ◆ Pretending pillows and bumps of blankets are mountains and driving small cars up and around them to find caves.

"See that they drink plenty of liquids."

Most doctors are not concerned if children do not want to eat while they are sick, but do urge parents to see that a sick child continues to take in sufficient fluids. Sometimes, however, children refuse to drink when they are sick. When that happens, here are some suggestions:

- 1) Check with your doctor to be sure, but it probably doesn't matter what the child drinks for a few days, as long as it's wet. Soda or sports drinks may not be healthy drinks for children, but when children are sick, these beverages can help keep kids hydrated. Popsicles or ice cubes flavored and colored with fruit juice is another way of offering liquid.

- 2) A doll's tea service can often entice a sick child into pouring himself many cups of pretend or real tea from a tiny teapot. Sometimes parents feel a one-ounce tea cup doesn't offer much liquid, but if a child will swallow the ounce in order to pour another cup, it doesn't take long for seven or eight ounces of liquid to be consumed.
- 3) Drinking with straws is often appealing.
- 4) Dipping a small lollipop in a glass of water with the challenge, "See if you can make the water and the lollipop vanish at the same time," can be another way to dispose of six or eight ounces.
- 5) In general, it seems to work better to provide a young child with several small glasses of liquid than with one adult-sized glass. Children seem to become discouraged at the very sight of a huge glass.

Finally, a prescription for the nurse. If possible, ask a neighbor, friend, or relative to relieve you for a few minutes each day, to let you get out of the house - even if it's only to walk around the block.

Try to postpone other tasks in the house until the sick child is not consuming so much of your time and energy. Pamper yourself a little if you can. Explain to your patient that you will be a better nurse if you can take a shower or change your clothes or watch a television show or read a chapter in your book.

Source: Jennifer Birckmayer, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.