

Patient Resource Guide:

Non-Oral Medication Administration

INTRODUCTION

While the most common, and often most convenient, way to take medication may be to swallow a pill, sometimes this option may be too painful or no longer possible. Thankfully, in these situations, there are alternative routes for medications to be administered without requiring hospitalization or the placement of tubes into the veins or the stomach. The routes below have been to be safe and effective alternatives to taking medications by mouth.

COMMON NON-ORAL ROUTES OF MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION

Route	Important Counseling Points
Sublingual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medication can be absorbed from under the tongue directly into the blood stream without needing to be swallowed to take effect • Concentrated liquid medications can be administered in small volumes under the tongue • The small volume often prevents the patient from coughing or gagging when administered while at the same time decreasing the risk of pneumonia for patients at risk for swallowing directly into the lungs (aspiration) • Many medications commonly used for symptom management are available in a concentrated liquid
Rectal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly all oral medications, even long-acting pain medications, can be administered rectally with similar effectiveness • Absorption may be altered in patients with constipation or diarrhea • If patient or caregiver express concerns regarding issues of dignity, recommend discussion with hospice agency about the possibility of using a Macy catheter, preventing the need to directly manually insert medication into the rectum
Subcutaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medications can be administered under the skin one time or even continuously • A subcutaneous line may be able to be administered to prevent a needle stick with each dose

Discuss options with hospice team before making any changes to medication administration route, as some medication formulations may need to be adjusted to promote convenience, safety and effectiveness.