If swallowing medications is difficult for you, talk to your doctor or pharmacist to see if your medications are available in a different form. Pills also might be available in one of the following forms:

■ Liquid – particularly useful for people with dysphagia who rely on a feeding tube

■ Dispersible – tablet that disintegrates in water

■ Buccal – tablet that dissolves when held between cheek and gum

■ Patch

■ Suppository – inserted into the rectum or vagina

■ Cream

■ Inhaled version

Crushing tablets or opening capsules

Ask your general practitioner or pharmacist if your tablets can be crushed or your capsules opened and dispersed in water before taking them. Only certain tablets or capsules can be given this way.

Swallowing tips

■ Before swallowing a pill, moisten your mouth with saliva or water.

■ Try cutting tablets in half or quarters and swallow each fraction individually.

■ Place the pill in the center of your tongue (and lengthwise along your tongue if the pill is oval-shaped).

■ Immediately take a sip of water and wash the pill into your throat throwing your head back.

■ Hold water in your mouth before inserting the pill – suspending the pill in water might help to flush it down.

■ Taking a deep breath might help suppress your gag reflex.

■ Try chewing some food before placing the pill in your mouth. Swallow the food and pill together.

■ Place your pills in applesauce or pudding. Coating the pills can lubricate them making them easier to swallow.

■ After swallowing the pill, follow it up with food to help it go down.

Special swallow techniques

■ Put your chin to your chest when swallowing – This will open up your windpipe and may be better for you than throwing your head back.

■ Try the pop-bottle method: Put the tablet on your tongue and close your lips around the opening of a bottle of water. While pursing your lips around the neck of the bottle, use a sucking motion to drink the water.

■ Use a straw to drink the water to swallow a pill – The suction can help.