



FIGURE 9-2: Medication cup. Both liquid and solid medications are placed in a cup for the patient.

Sometimes, a tablet must be crushed before it is administered; these tablets can be mixed with food or a liquid to make it easier for patients to swallow. A pair of devices called **mortar and pestle** is used to crush pills and tablets (Fast Tip 9.1).

Because tablets can be difficult to swallow given their chalk-like consistency, some medications are also available as gelatin-coated capsules (Fig. 9-3). These capsules can be easily pulled apart to mix the drug into food for patients with difficulty swallowing pills. This should be done only if approved by the pharmacy, and the contents of a capsule should be mixed only with small amounts of soft, thick food, such as ice cream or applesauce, to ensure that the entire dose is consumed.

Tablets can be coated to improve swallowing or prevent release in the stomach. **Enteric-coated** drugs are released not in the stomach but in the intestines; they are especially useful for patients with stomach ulcers or sensitivity. **Buffered** tablets have added antacids to prevent stomach irritation. Tablets can be scored (grooved in halves) for easy separation if half of a tablet is needed (Fig. 9-4). Caplets (see Fig. 9-1) are similar to tablets but may be easier for some patients to swallow because of the oblong shape.

A capsule can be in a **timed-release** or **delayed action** form that prevents it from being broken down in the acidic environment of the stomach. Instead, the capsule breaks down in the more alkalotic environment of the small intestine. Adderall XR is an extended-release capsule used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. This medication is given only one time, in the morning, and the timed-release action allows the patient to take it less often. Timed-released capsules cannot be opened or crushed because doing so releases the drug all at once, causing an overdose. Steps for administering solid oral medications are outlined in Procedure Box 9-1.

Fast Tip 9.1 Pills that Shouldn't be Crushed

Not all pills can be crushed. For example, pills coated to slow the release of the drug (enteric-coated tablets) and timed-release capsules should not be crushed. If in doubt, contact a pharmacist or check drug resources to see whether a tablet can be crushed.



FIGURE 9-3: Capsules. Capsules are available in variety of sizes and colors.