

■ ENTERAL MEDICATIONS

Enteral medications include any medications that involve the gastrointestinal tract, such as capsules, tablets, enemas, suppositories, and many others. The most common enteral route of administration is the oral route. Most common medications are given orally and include antibiotics, antacids, and antihypertensives to treat infections, heartburn, and hypertension, respectively, as well as vitamins to supplement the diet. Although absorption is slower compared with the parenteral route, oral administration is less invasive and is well tolerated by patients. In addition, because it requires little to no equipment, it is one of the least expensive routes of medication administration. For these reasons, the oral route is preferred. These are some of the advantages. Disadvantages include the risks of choking and possible aspiration of the medication into the lungs, thus leading to infections or even death. Another disadvantage is that stomach acid destroys or inactivates many medications. The most common medication that cannot be given by mouth is insulin. The stomach acid destroys insulin and renders it useless to the body. In addition, the patient's cooperation is necessary for this route to work.

Medications given via the oral route are absorbed at different points in the digestive tract. Some medications are absorbed directly from the mucosa of the stomach. Others are coated to protect them from stomach acid or to allow timed release and thereby eliminate the need for frequent doses. Many medication-related considerations arise with regard to food. Sometimes, it is important to take a medication on an empty stomach to ensure the most rapid action. Certain other medications are very irritating to the gastric mucosa and lead to nausea and vomiting, so patients are advised to take these medications with a glass of milk or food. Sometimes, patients are advised to take medications with a full glass of water, which will also prevent stomach irritation. In other instances, plenty of water is indicated to prevent dehydration. The guiding principles are familiarity with the medication and an awareness of dietary guidelines to teach the patient.

Contraindications to the oral route include nausea, vomiting, and difficulty swallowing. In addition, the oral route should not be used for medications that become inactivated by stomach acids or in patients who are not conscious and alert. Precautions include close monitoring of any patient with difficulty swallowing or a questionable level of consciousness. In addition, care must be taken to make sure that patients actually swallow the medication and do not hide it or throw it away.

Oral Solid Medications and Administration

Oral medications can be either solid or liquid. Solid forms include tablets and capsules. Tablets are disks of compressed medication in distinctive shapes and colors (Fig. 9-1). Oral drugs are frequently poured out of a bulk (multiple-dose) bottle first into the cap of the bottle and then into a medicine cup (Fig. 9-2). Frequently, pills come prepackaged in individual doses, referred to as unit-dose. A group of unit-doses may be contained in a blister pack, which must be opened gently by pressing on the tablet so that the pill falls into the medicine cup. Always wash your hands before administering medications, and avoid touching the pill to prevent transfer of microbes to the patient.



FIGURE 9-1: Tablets. Tablets come in a variety of sizes, colors, and shapes. Oblong tablets are known as caplets.