

Asthma Medicines

Asthma can be well controlled by avoiding or managing triggers for asthma and using asthma medicines correctly. Most asthma medicines are inhaled into the lungs, but sometimes tablets, syrups or injections must be used. The three main types of asthma medicines are called relievers, preventers and symptom controllers.

Relievers

Relievers open airways quickly by relaxing the muscles around air passages. Reliever inhaler devices are blue in colour.

Relievers include: *Airomir, Asmol, Bricanyl* and *Ventolin* inhalers

Relievers:

- Can relieve asthma symptoms in a few minutes, with their effect lasting from 3 to 6 hours
- Are usually recommended for use 'as needed' for quick relief of asthma symptoms
- May be used before exercise, to prevent exercise-induced asthma
- Are available from a pharmacist without a prescription.

Some people may feel a little shaky and notice a fast heart beat for a short time after using a reliever inhaler. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Preventers

Preventers reduce inflammation in the airways, dry up mucus and make airways less sensitive to asthma triggers. They can prevent asthma symptoms and lung damage if used regularly.

Preventers include:

- Corticosteroids (e.g. *Alvesco, Flixotide, Pulmicort* and *Qvar* inhalers)
- Cromones (e.g. *Intal* and *Tilade* inhalers)
- Leukotriene receptor antagonists (e.g. *Singulair* tablets).

Preventers:

- Must be taken regularly every day, even when you don't have any symptoms
- May take several weeks to improve symptoms
- Will not relieve an asthma attack once it has started.

Some people need to use preventers for only a few weeks or months of the year, but other people need to use preventers all year round. If you are well (no symptoms and rarely using your reliever), ask your doctor to review your asthma medicines. Preventers should not be stopped unless advised by a doctor.

Symptom controllers

Symptom controllers relax muscles around the airways and when used regularly, in combination with a corticosteroid preventer, may improve symptom control. For treating asthma, a symptom controller must always be used with a corticosteroid preventer.

Symptom controllers include: *Foradile*, *Oxis* and *Serevent* inhalers).

Combination inhalers

Combination inhalers contain a corticosteroid preventer and a symptom controller in the same inhaler device. To prevent asthma symptoms, they must be used every day, even when you don't have any symptoms.

Combination inhalers include: *Seretide* and *Symbicort* inhalers.

Some people can use the *Symbicort* combination inhaler as both a preventer and as a fast-acting reliever. However, you

must not use *Symbicort* as your reliever unless instructed to by your doctor.

Other medicines

- Ipratropium (e.g. *Atrovent* inhaler): can relax muscles around the airways and may help some people.
- Prednisolone and prednisone tablets or liquid (e.g. *Panafcortelone*, *Predmix*, *Redipred*, *Solone*, *Sone*): oral corticosteroids that may be used to treat more severe asthma.
- Theophylline (e.g. *Nuelin* tablets, *Aminophylline* injection): can relax muscles around the airways and may be used to treat severe asthma.
- *Xolair* injection – may prevent or relieve the symptoms of allergic asthma in some people.

Inhalation devices

Inhalers

Inhalers deliver medicine directly into the lungs. There are two main types of inhalers:

1. Aerosol inhalers (e.g. Metered Dose Inhalers and Autohalers)
2. Dry powder inhalers (e.g. Turbuhalers and Accuhalers).

Good asthma control depends on using inhalers correctly. If you are prescribed an inhaler, ask a pharmacist, doctor or asthma educator to demonstrate its correct use and to check your inhaler technique regularly. Videos showing correct inhaler techniques can be found on the National Asthma Council website www.nationalasthma.org.au.

Spacers

A spacer is a chamber that fits onto a Metered Dose Inhaler (MDI) to help get more medicine into the lungs. Spacers can also reduce side effects from inhaled medicines. The medicine is sprayed into the spacer at one end and breathed into the lungs from the other end. There is a variety of different spacers available including children's spacers, large volume spacers, compact spacers and disposable spacers. Asthma professionals recommend that an MDI always be used with a spacer.

Nebulisers

A nebuliser is a pump that sprays liquid asthma medicine as a fine mist. The mist is then inhaled through a facemask or mouthpiece. For most people, a puffer and spacer are easier to use than a nebuliser, and just as effective.

Self care

- Avoid or manage triggers that make your asthma worse.
- Use inhalers correctly. Check your technique.
- Always carry a blue reliever inhaler with you (unless your doctor has told you to use *Symbicort* as both a preventer and a reliever).
- Develop a written Asthma Action Plan with a doctor. Use this plan to manage worsening asthma symptoms.
- Check there is medicine left in your asthma inhalers.
- Check that your medicine has not expired.
- After using inhalers containing corticosteroids (*Alvesco*, *Flixotide*, *Pulmicort*, *Qvar*, *Seretide* or *Symbicort*)

Important

Asthma treatment aims to prevent asthma symptoms by regular daily use of a preventer or combined preventer and symptom controller. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice about how and when to use asthma medicines. Always read and follow instructions carefully.

Consult a doctor or follow your Asthma Action Plan if you:

- Need to use a reliever more than two days a week
- Have daytime asthma symptoms more than two days a week
- Use the whole contents of a reliever inhaler in less than a month.
- Have asthma symptoms during the night
- Limit your physical activity because of asthma
- Notice peak flow readings worsening
- Have an asthma attack.

rinse mouth with water, gargle and spit out. This reduces the risk of the side effects of thrush and hoarse voice.

- Clean inhaler devices regularly. Read the product information for cleaning instructions for each device.
- Wash a spacer before use and then once a month, with warm water and kitchen detergent. Leave it to air dry without rinsing or wiping. This cleaning method reduces static charge on the spacer. Wipe detergent off mouth piece before use.
- Wear identification (e.g. a *MedicAlert* bracelet) that says you have asthma.

For more information

Asthma Australia

Phone: 1800 645 130

Website: www.asthmaaustralia.org.au

National Asthma Council

Phone: 1800 032 495

Website: www.nationalasthma.org.au

MedicAlert Foundation

Phone: 1800 88 22 22

Website: www.medicalert.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.*

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