



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Asthma Medicines

Asthma can be well controlled by avoiding trigger factors 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

(e.g., *Airomir, Asmol, Bricanyl, Epaq* and *Ventolin* inhalers)

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

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 rapid heart beat for a 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)
- Cromolyns (e.g., *Intal* and *Tilade* inhalers)
- Leukotriene – receptor antagonists (e.g., *Singular* tablets).

Preventers:

- Must be taken regularly every day, even when symptoms are absent
- May take several weeks to improve symptoms
- Will not relieve an asthma attack once it has started.

Some people only need preventers for a set period but other people need to take 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

(e.g., *Foradile, Oxis, Serevent* inhalers)

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

Combination inhalers

(e.g., *Seretide, Symbicort*)

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 symptoms are absent.

In certain cases the *Symbicort* combination inhaler may be prescribed for use as both a preventer and as a fast-acting reliever. (Do not use *Symbicort* as your reliever unless instructed to by your doctor.)

Other medicines

- *Atrovent* and *Ipратrin* inhalers – can relax airways and may help some people with severe asthma and other airways diseases.
- Prednisolone and prednisone tablets or liquid (e.g., *Panafcortelone, Predmix, Redipred, Solone*) – anti-inflammatory corticosteroids used to treat moderate and severe asthma.
- Theophylline (e.g., *Nuelin* tablets, *Aminophylline* injection) – can relax airways and is occasionally used for 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, Accuhalers and Aerolisers).

Good asthma control depends on using inhalers properly. 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. A video showing correct inhaler techniques can be seen on the National Asthma Council website www.nationalasthma.org.au.

Spacers

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

Important

Asthma treatment aims to prevent asthma symptoms by regular daily use of a preventer or combined preventer and symptom controller.

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

- Need to use a reliever more than 3 times a week
- Have asthma symptoms more than 3 times a week
- Notice peak flow readings deteriorating
- Have an asthma attack.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for information and advice about how and when to use asthma medicines and always read and follow instructions carefully.

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 and more effective to use than a nebuliser.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

Self care

- Avoid or manage triggers that make your asthma worse.
- Use inhalers correctly.
- Always carry a blue reliever inhaler with you (unless you are using *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.
- Ensure there is medicine left in your asthma inhalers.
- Ensure that your medicine has not expired.
- After using inhalers containing corticosteroids (*Alvesco*, *Flixotide*, *Pulmicort*, *Qvar*, *Seretide* or *Symbicort*) rinse mouth with water, gargle and spit out. This reduces the risk of side effects of thrush and hoarse voice.
- Clean inhaler devices regularly. Refer to the product information for cleaning instructions for each device.
- If using a spacer, wash it regularly in warm water and kitchen detergent. Leave it to air dry without rinsing or wiping.
- Don't smoke.

Related fact cards

- *Asthma*
- *Smoking series*

For more information

Asthma Foundations Australia – phone 1800 645 130 or website www.asthmaaustralia.org.au

National Asthma Council – phone 1800 032 495 or website www.nationalasthma.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

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

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