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## Understanding Asthma Inhalers

Did you know that only seven percent of people understand how to use asthma inhalers the right way?<sup>1</sup> Combine that with a wide array of asthma medications, and asthma management can become more than a little confusing. Together, we can change that!

Everybody is different. So your doctor decides which type of medication and inhaler is best for you. But here's a brief overview of what you need to know.

**Types of inhaled medications.** Inhaled medications help airways stay open without some of the side effects of those taken by mouth or injection. These medications work in different ways. For example, some reduce airway inflammation, while others relax small muscles around airways.<sup>2</sup>

One class of inhaled asthma medication provides quick relief from symptoms such as tightness and gasping. Often used daily—even without symptoms—the other class is for long-term control.<sup>3</sup> If you often use quick-relief “rescue” medications more than twice a week, you may need a change in your treatment.

**Types of asthma inhalers.** Asthma inhalers are hand-held devices that deliver medication directly into your lungs. People use inhalers either to prevent or stop an asthma attack.

- A metered dose inhaler has a boot-shaped mouthpiece and a pressurized canister containing medication. Typically, you release the medicine by pushing the canister into the boot. Some of these inhalers contain counters that tell you how many doses remain. If not, track the number of doses you've used.
- Some metered dose inhalers contain a spacer. This temporarily holds medication until it's released, which makes it easier to receive a full dose with a slow breath. Some spacers are built in. Others attach separately to the inhaler. Infants or children may require a facemask to ensure the right dose reaches their lungs.
- Dry powder inhalers release medication when you breathe a deep, fast breath.<sup>4</sup>
- Using air or oxygen under pressure, nebulizers deliver a fine liquid mist of medication through a tube or mask.<sup>3</sup>

**Misuse of inhalers.** Different inhalers require different techniques. For example, some require coordinating your breath with the medication release. Others require a fast, deep breath. Some require shaking and priming. Others require the dexterity to use a cocking device.<sup>4</sup>

If you don't use inhalers or spacers the right way, you might get too little or too much medicine. A recent study showed that 63 percent of those who misused inhalers or spacers missed three or more steps. The most common mistake with metered dose inhalers? Not exhaling before depressing the canister to inhale the medication.<sup>1</sup>

The study found that people's memories fade, so they forget what to do. What this means is you may need a “refresher course” from time to time. Be sure to ask your doctor or me if you have any questions about inhaler techniques. As this study shows, most people are unclear on how to use inhalers, so don't feel embarrassed about asking questions. We are always here to help..... even with that refresher course.

*Nothing herein constitutes medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or is a substitute for professional advice. You should always seek the advice of your physician or other medical professional if you have questions or concerns about a medical condition.*

## Sources

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