



How to give medicines: asthma inhalers

This leaflet provides instructions on how to use inhalers for asthma medicine. This includes 'preventer inhalers', which are used regularly in order to prevent attacks (this is sometimes called asthma prophylaxis), and 'reliever inhalers', which are used during asthma attacks.

This leaflet is for parents and carers about how to use medicines in children. Our information sometimes differs from that provided by the manufacturers, because their information is usually aimed at adults. Please read this leaflet carefully. Keep it somewhere safe so that you can read it again

Your child's 'preventer inhaler' will not reduce wheezing or breathlessness during an acute asthma attack – your child should use their 'reliever' inhaler for this (this is often a blue salbutamol inhaler).

This leaflet provides a short introduction about asthma inhalers, and how to give them. Leaflets on individual inhaled medicines for asthma are available on the website: www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/medicines

Asthma inhalers can take practice to learn to use, so don't worry if it takes a little time to get it right. If you are not sure whether you are using the inhaler properly, or need help, contact your asthma nurse or pharmacist, who will be able to show you what to do or check what you are doing.

The following terms are commonly used when talking about asthma inhalers and how to use them

- **Acute asthma attack** - sudden attack or start of a severe attack when the air passages into the lungs become narrow, making it hard to breathe and causing symptoms such as cough, wheezing and breathlessness.
- **Aerosol inhalers** - can refer to either breath-actuated or pressurised metered dose inhalers (pMDI); it is commonly used to refer to pressurised inhalers.
- **Breath-actuated inhaler** - breath-actuated means that the force of *breathing in* releases the dose of medicine from the inhaler.
- **Evohaler** - is a type of commonly used pressurised inhaler
- **Pressurised metered dose inhaler (MDI)** - these inhalers use a small canister with a mixture of the medicine and a gas or liquid that turns the medicine into a fine spray as you press the canister. This makes sure the medicine reaches the lungs properly.
- **Primed** - to prepare for use
- **Prophylaxis** - means to prevent
- **Puffer** - another word for an inhaler
- **Spacer** - a device that is attached to the inhaler to make it easier for your child to take their inhaler. The spacer helps the medicine to get straight to their lungs. Spacers can only be used with pressurised inhalers.

Types of asthma inhalers

Asthma inhalers are broadly used as either:

- **'Preventer inhalers'** - used regularly in order to prevent attacks (sometimes called asthma prophylaxis)
- **'Reliever inhalers'** - are usually blue and are used during asthma attacks or sometimes before exercise.

How to use the inhaler

How to use an inhaler depends on how the device delivers the medicine into the lungs. An instruction leaflet will be provided with your child's inhaler, and instructions can also be found on each inhaler manufacturers' website. This will tell you how to put the inhaler together and how to use it.

On the following pages there is information on how to use:

- Pressurised metered dose inhalers (pMDI) with a spacer.
- Breath-actuated dry powder inhalers

How do I keep an inhaler clean?

Each inhaler (and spacer device, if used) will come with instructions about how to keep them clean. Generally you can take the spacer apart, wash it in warm, soapy water and leave it to air dry.

⚠ Do not dry any parts with a towel or similar as this can create a static charge, which can prevent the medicine from reaching the lungs.

Where should I keep the inhaler?

- Your child should have their 'reliever inhaler' with them at all times in case they have an asthma attack.
- Your child should always keep the inhaler cap on when they are not using it.
- Extreme temperatures and high altitudes can affect the medicine in the inhaler. Don't leave the inhaler where it might get too hot or too cold e.g on a sunny window sill or in a car on a very hot or cold day.
- Dry powder inhalers need to be kept dry so should not be stored in a bathroom.

Who to contact for more information

Your child's doctor, pharmacist or nurse will be able to give you more information about your child's medicine for asthma. You can also get useful information from:

England: NHS 111 - Tel 111 - www.nhs.uk

Scotland: NHS 24 - Tel 111 - www.nhs24.scot

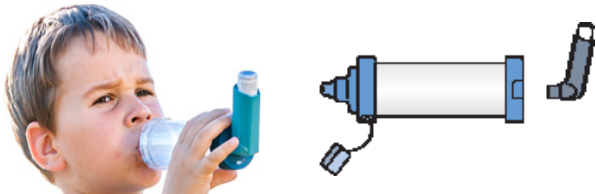
Wales: NHS 111 Wales - Tel 111 - www.111.wales.nhs.uk

Northern Ireland: NI Direct - www.nidirect.gov.uk

Asthma UK Helpline 0800 300 222 5800 www.asthma.org.uk

Using a pressurised inhaler with a 'spacer' device

- Pressurised inhalers are often used with a device called a spacer, so that the medicine is breathed into the lungs more easily.
- A spacer is a sealed, empty container that an inhaler can be connected to. The spacer acts as a collecting chamber that the asthma medicine is released into and inhaled slowly, without needing to get the timing and speed exactly right. The correct way to use a pressurised inhaler and spacer is described below.



- Some spacers come with a face mask. Talk to your asthma nurse or pharmacist about the best type of spacer device for your child.
- For older children, they could try a breath-actuated dry powder inhaler (instructions for how to use these is in the next section).
- Put the spacer device together, following the instructions that come with it.
- For a young child, attach the mask to the spacer mouth piece. If your child can hold the spacer mouthpiece in their mouth and hold it firmly between their lips, creating a good seal, you may not need to use the mask.
- Some spacers (e.g. aerochambers) only come with a mask or a mouth piece. If you are unsure, check with your asthma nurse or pharmacist that you have the best type of inhaler for your child.
- Take the cap off the inhaler, making sure that the mouth piece is clean.
- While holding the inhaler upright, place your thumb on the bottom of the inhaler and your first finger on the top. Then shake the inhaler several times up and down.
- If the inhaler is new or has not been used for three days or more, release one puff into the air before use.
- Insert the mouth piece of the inhaler into the spacer. It should fit easily and securely.
- Place the mouthpiece in your child's mouth (or mask over your child's mouth and nose, ensuring a good seal with the skin around the mouth). Reassure your child during this step, as they may be distressed.
- Encourage your child to breathe in slowly and gently.
- Press down **once** on the aerosol canister with the first finger. This releases one puff into the spacer.

- If your child is using a mask hold it in place and count to 20 encouraging your child to breath normally. If they are not using a mask encourage them to take five deep and slow breaths in and out. **It is important not to rush this step.**
- Remove the spacer from your child's mouth. If more than one dose/puff is required, shake the inhaler, wait 30 seconds before repeating the previous steps.
- Your child should rinse their mouth out thoroughly with water or clean their teeth.

How to use a breath-actuated (dry powder) inhaler

- Breath-actuated means that it is the force of breathing-in that releases the dose of medicine from the inhaler.
- A hard, fast breath is necessary to draw the medicine into the lungs.
- Breathing in too slowly might mean the medicine does not work properly. Some inhalers will show when the dose is released properly, for example by a 'click' sound or a green indicator.
- There are many different types of dry-powder inhaler: e.g. Accuhaler, Clickhaler, Diskhaler, Easyhaler, Novolizer, Turbohaler, and Twisthaler.
- These are not used with a spacer.
- Most breath-actuated (dry powder) inhalers need to be 'primed' or loaded before breathing in. Follow the instructions that come with your inhaler for how to get it ready. If you are not sure how to do this, ask your pharmacist or nurse to show you.

The following instructions are for **most breath-actuated** (dry-powder) inhalers.

- Load the dose as instructed in the manufacturer's leaflet.
- Ask your child to breathe out normally, as far as they can. Place the mouthpiece of the inhaler firmly between the lips, ensuring a good seal around the mouthpiece.
- Ask your child to breathe in quickly and deeply to release the dose from the inhaler.
- Take the inhaler out of your child's mouth. They should close their mouth and hold their breath for 5–10 seconds, or for as long as they can comfortably manage. They can then breathe normally. It is important not to rush this step.
- If your child has to take more than one puff, they should breathe normally for a minute or so before giving the next one.
- Your child should rinse their mouth out thoroughly with water or clean their teeth.

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