



# 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 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., *Accolate* and *Singulair* tablets).

### Preventers:

- Must be taken regularly every day, even when symptoms are absent
- May take two weeks or more 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 help to relax the muscles around the airways for up to 12 hours. They are usually used daily in combination with preventers, to improve control of asthma symptoms.

## Combination inhalers

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

Combination inhalers contain a corticosteroid preventer and a symptom controller together in one inhaler. They must be taken every day to prevent asthma symptoms.

In certain cases the *Symbicort* combination inhaler can be used as both a preventer and as a fast-acting reliever. Always ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice before using *Symbicort* as a reliever. (**Note:** *Seretide* cannot be used as a fast-acting reliever)

## Other medicines

- *Atrovent* and *Ipratrin* inhalers – can relax airways and may help some people with severe asthma and other airways diseases.
- *Prednisolone* and *prednisone* tablets or liquid – anti-inflammatory corticosteroids used to treat moderate and severe asthma.
- *Nuelin* tablets and syrup, *Brondecon* elixir and *Aminophylline* injection – can relax airways and are 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 types of inhalers:

1. Aerosol inhalers – puffers and Autohalers
2. Dry powder inhalers – Turbuhalers, Accuhalers and Aerolizers.

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.

### Spacers

A spacer is a plastic chamber that fits onto a puffer. The medicine is sprayed into the spacer at one end and breathed in from the other end. Spacers help get more medicine into the lungs. They can also help people who find it hard to press down on their puffers and breathe in at the same time (e.g., young children).

### 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

### 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.

use than a nebuliser.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

## Self care

- Avoid triggers that make your asthma worse.
- 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 inhaler.
- 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](http://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au)

**National Asthma Council** – website [www.nationalasthma.org.au](http://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.

**Pharmacy Self Care Support** – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

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

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