

How to Use a Metered Dose Inhaler When Your Spacer Is Not Available — Closed-Mouth Technique

To get the most benefit from your asthma medication inhalers (metered-dose inhalers) it is important that you know how to use your medication inhaler and spacer correctly. Studies have shown that approximately half of all people using medication inhalers do not use them correctly. This means that much of the medicine never reaches the lungs. This can result in asthma flare ups and symptoms.

Things to remember:

- Using a spacer helps deliver more of the medicine into the lungs. The Palo Alto Medical Foundation Asthma Management Team recommends the use of a spacer device when using your metered-dose inhaler (medication inhaler).
- Inhaler technique is important and can be learned with practice.
- **Always** use a spacer when taking an inhaled steroid (controller medication) by metered-dose inhaler.
- Each inhaler has special instructions for “**priming**” or getting the inhaler ready to use when it is new or has not been used in awhile. Check the package insert or go to the Palo Alto Medical Foundation asthma web site for the handout, ‘HFA Inhaler Maintenance’ for instructions.
www.pamf.org/asthma/education/handouts.html

In a situation when you would need to use an inhaler without a spacer, do the following:

1. Whenever possible, stand up when using your inhaler. It is easier to take a deep breath when standing.
2. Remove the cap and hold the inhaler upright.
3. Shake the inhaler.
4. Tilt your head back slightly and take a big breathe in and then out, slowly.
5. Before you take your next breath in, place the inhaler in your mouth sealing your lips around the mouthpiece.
6. Start to breathe in, and at the same time, press down on the top of the inhaler canister to spray one puff of the medicine. (less medicine will reach your breathing tubes if you do not breathe in as you press the inhaler because it settles on your tongue and inside your mouth)
7. Take a slow and deep (big) breath in through your mouth for 3 to 5 seconds to get the medicine in to your breathing tubes and down into your lungs.
8. Hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds.
9. Relax and breathe out slowly.
10. If additional puffs are ordered repeat steps 4 through 9. For inhaled quick-relief medicine (i.e. Albuterol, Xopenex, Ventolin, Proventil) wait 1 to 3 minutes between puffs/sprays. There is no need to wait between puffs for other medicines.



Tips

- If you use two puffs, it is important to take them one at a time.
- Since you can't see how much medicine is left in the canister, you need to know how many puffs a medication canister holds. Some metered-dose inhalers come with a counter. If so, monitor the counter and refill the prescription when you are down to a three-day supply or when indicated by a change in number color. For metered-dose inhalers that do not have a counter, look on the side of the medication canister or in the package insert that comes with the inhaler and find the total number of puffs (called doses) the canister contains.

For daily controller medicines:

- Divide the total number of doses in the canister by the total number of puffs you use each day to know how many days the canister will last.
- Count out the days on a calendar and note the date the canister will run out of medicine.
- Write this date on the canister or on the calendar so you remember to get a refill one week before.

For rescue inhalers:

- Keep a record of the number of puffs you have used. One way is to mark on the calendar for each time you use it. Another way is to place a blank label on the plastic holder of your medication inhaler and make a mark for each puff. This way you will know how many doses of medication you have used and can refill the prescription when needed.

Don't wait until the canister is empty before getting a refill.

For more asthma resources visit pamf.org/asthma