
Asthma medication

Summary

- The main types of medication for asthma treatment are relievers and preventers.
 - Asthma can be well controlled with the appropriate medication in almost all people.
 - If you are worried about side effects from medication, do not stop or reduce the dose without speaking with your doctor.
 - Stopping medication could lead to an asthma attack or asthma emergency that is worse than any potential side effect.
 - During an asthma attack, follow your asthma action plan.
 - In an asthma emergency, call triple zero (000) for an ambulance.
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Uncontrolled or untreated asthma in adults and children can damage your lungs or those of your child. Your doctor will prescribe the correct medication and help you to develop a plan to manage your own or your child's asthma. Medication can either help to relieve the symptoms or prevent the symptoms, or can be used in combination. Your doctor will develop an asthma action plan for you or your child. Do not alter the use of asthma medication (for you or a child in your care) without speaking to your doctor or unless the asthma action plan tells you what to do in a specific situation.

Types of asthma medication

Asthma can be well controlled with the appropriate medication in almost all people. The main types of medication are:

- relievers that act quickly to relax the tight muscles around the airways – this is the medication used during an asthma attack
- preventers that slowly make the airways less sensitive to triggers by reducing swelling and mucus inside the airways – these are taken daily
- combination medications with preventers containing two different medications.

Asthma Australia's brochure [**Asthma medications and devices**](#) provides more detailed information about the different types of asthma medications.

Reliever asthma medication

If you have asthma, you need to carry reliever medication at all times. Relievers are used only when you have asthma symptoms or if your doctor recommends using it before exercise. You should avoid overusing reliever medication.

Preventer asthma medication

Preventer medication is usually a daily, low dose of inhaled corticosteroid. Most adults and children can achieve good control of asthma symptoms with a low dose. It is important to take your preventer every day as prescribed, even if you feel well. Preventer medication is the key to keeping well with asthma.

Inhaled corticosteroid reduces swelling and mucus in the airways and reduces your risk of severe asthma symptoms or flare-ups.

It is best to always use a spacer if you have a puffer. A spacer is a plastic attachment to the puffer that helps the medication enter your lungs effectively.

Depending on the triggers of asthma symptoms, some people may only need preventer medication during a

particular season, for example, in spring if you are allergic to pollen. Others may need preventers all year round. Best medical practice is to give only the smallest doses of medication to keep symptoms under control, but you should never reduce the dose of medication without speaking about it with your doctor.

Combination asthma medication

If inhaled corticosteroid alone has not controlled your asthma, your doctor may prescribe a combination preventer. Combination preventer medication is taken in one device and includes an inhaled corticosteroid and a medication to relax the airways (called a long-acting beta-agonist).

Side effects of asthma medications

All medication has the potential to cause side effects. People have taken asthma medication for many years and side effects are well known, so ask your doctor for more information.

The most common side effects of preventer medication (inhaled corticosteroids) are a hoarse voice, sore mouth and throat, and fungal infections of the throat. You can reduce the risk of these side effects by using a spacer with the puffer and always rinsing the mouth with water (and gargling, and spitting it out) after using the preventer.

If you are worried about side effects of asthma medication, do not stop your dose of medication or those of a child in your care without speaking about it with your doctor. Stopping medication could lead to an asthma attack or asthma emergency that is worse than any potential side effects.

Asthma attacks

During an asthma attack, follow your asthma action plan. In asthma emergencies, call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance. Tell the operator that someone is having an asthma emergency.

While waiting for the ambulance, give four separate puffs of reliever medication, taking four breaths for each puff, every four minutes.

The National Asthma Council of Australia has advice about asthma first aid for adults and children [<https://www.nationalasthma.org.au/asthma-first-aid>].

Where to get help

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Your doctor
- **The Royal Children's Hospital** has produced a number of videos to help you better understand and manage your child's asthma.
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **National Home Doctor Service** for after-hours home doctor visits (bulk billed) Tel. 13 SICK (13 7425)
- **Asthma Foundation of Victoria** Tel. 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462)
- **National Asthma Council of Australia** Tel. 1800 032 495
- **Allergy and Anaphylaxis Australia** Tel. 1300 728 000

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