

Asthma Inhaler Medications:

Your child has been prescribed asthma medication by their physician. As a parent, it can be confusing due to the number of different asthma inhalers available. This handout provides you basic information on the types of medications used to manage asthma. Always consult your physician/pharmacist if you have specific questions.

Inhaled medications are one of the most efficient and strategic ways to treat or prevent asthma symptoms. With proper technique, these medications go directly into the small airways where asthma occurs. This reduces medication being absorbed throughout the entire body, thus reducing side effects. There are (2) **two types of inhaled asthma** medications: **quick relief** (rescue/reliever) medications and **controller** (maintenance) medications.

1. Quick-Relief (Rescue or Reliever) Medications are fast-acting medications used to temporarily relieve asthma symptoms, usually within five to 20 minutes, and should be used when needed, *based on symptoms*. These types of medicines are inhaled directly into the lungs through an inhaler (with spacer) or a nebulizer. The campus nurse needs a quick-relief inhaler in the clinic so when your child presents with symptoms your child can receive the medication to alleviate symptoms in a timely manner. Common Quick reliever medications are Albuterol (Proair, ProAir Respiclick, Ventolin, Proventil) and Xopenex.

Rescue/reliever medications:

- Used to relieve late warning signs and asthma symptoms once they have started.
- Are fast-acting (start working in five to 20 minutes) but **only last a few hours**.
- **Do not control or prevent inflammation in the airways.**
- Relaxes the tightened muscle bands around the airways (bronchospasm).
- **Reliever medications should be taken occasionally; they are not meant to be taken daily.**

Talk to your doctor if you find your child needs the quick-relief **medications more than twice a week for symptoms**. Needing it too frequently (greater than 2 times per week) is a sign of worsening asthma and not be accepted.

Albuterol given before exercise to prevent Exercise Induced Bronchospasm (EIB) is acceptable; but it is imperative not to confuse EIB with uncontrolled asthma. Symptoms will occur within a few minutes of minimal exercise if a person's asthma is not in control. Symptoms of EIB may begin during *strenuous* exercise and will usually be worse 5 to 10 minutes *after* stopping exercise. Symptoms appearing with minimal exertion or interfering with daily activities are not acceptable as this could be an indicator of uncontrolled asthma. Those with controlled asthma can and should lead normal active lifestyles and only occasionally need to pre-medicate (such as during a cold or allergy season)

The **Asthma Control Test** is a great tool to assess your child's level of asthma control. <http://www.asthma.com/>

2. Controller (Maintenance) Medications work slowly over time (weeks to months) to reduce airway inflammation (underlying cause of asthma) and help prevent asthma symptoms from occurring in the first place.

Controller medications:

- Prevent asthma symptoms from occurring and will reduce and/or prevent the inflammation in the airways - inflammation leads to the twitchiness and reactivity of the muscle bands around the airway (bronchospasm).
- Will not provide a quick relief of asthma symptoms.
- Do not show immediate results, but work slowly over time.
- **Controller medication should be taken daily - even when not having symptoms.**

Taking controller medicines as directed by your doctor helps your child attain a normal quality of life. Your child will have:

- More days without asthma symptoms and reduce risk of future asthma episodes.
- Will not need quick-relief medications as often.
- Will have fewer symptoms at night therefore cognitively ready for the following school day.
- Will breathe better and able to maintain a normal activity level and tolerate environmental triggers
- May avoid permanent lung function changes/damage
- Reduction of loss of days due to asthma (school –student; work – parents)

Proper inhaler technique is vital and ensures medication reaches the smaller airways of the lung. Visit www.use-inhalers.com/

If your physician has prescribed medications for you, it is important to continue to take them so symptoms are controlled. There are prescription assistance programs that offer reduced cost or free medications to individuals who qualify based on financial need. Pharmaceutical companies offer many of these programs and information is available by either looking on the web or by directly calling these companies. Coupons are often available for specific medications from their websites. There are also programs such as [Partnership for Prescription Assistance](#), a program offered by pharmaceutical research companies or [NeedyMeds](#), a non-profit organization that assist patients explore programs for which they may be eligible in terms of receiving free or reduced cost medications.