

Asthma drug therapy is one of the most important tools in preventing asthma attacks.

Medications used for asthma treatment include those that control the asthma (controller medications) and those used to provide quick relief during an attack (rescue medications). Because asthma affects people differently, the types of medications used and how often to take them should be discussed with a doctor. A doctor will help develop an Asthma Action Plan to best treat each patient's condition.

TIPS TO MAXIMIZE THERAPY

Taking asthma medications everyday, as directed, is the key to preventing asthma attacks. Following are some tips to help maximize asthma therapy:

- Take medications at the same time each day, as part of a routine (e.g., exercise, brushing teeth)
- Put a reminder note on the bathroom mirror or refrigerator
- Ask family members for medication reminders
- Always carry a rescue inhaler to use during an asthma attack
- Ask a doctor or pharmacist to demonstrate the proper technique for using an inhaler and, if necessary, a spacer
- Ask a doctor or pharmacist to demonstrate how to determine if there is enough medication in an inhaler

Long-Term or Controller Medications

Long-term or controller medications are used to prevent asthma attacks. It is important to remember that these medications should NOT be used during an asthma attack. They should be taken on a daily basis. Controller medications are very important in the treatment of asthma.

Inhaled corticosteroids are considered the mainstay of long-term therapy for most asthma sufferers. Studies have shown that asthma patients who use inhaled corticosteroids regularly are less likely to go to the emergency room, be hospitalized, or die due to a severe asthma attack. Therefore, it is crucial for asthma patients to follow their doctor's instructions when it comes to asthma treatment.

In severe cases, doctors may add another long-term medication called a long-acting beta₂-agonist. When used with inhaled corticosteroids, these have been proven to prevent death and hospitalization due to severe asthma attacks. Leukotriene modifiers and mast cell stabilizers can also be used. Oral corticosteroids are only used as long-term therapy in very severe cases of asthma. Due to their side effects in long-term use they are usually stopped as soon as possible.

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LONG-TERM OR CONTROLLER MEDICATIONS			
Common Brand Names	Generic Name	How Do They Work?	Generic Available?
Inhaled Corticosteroids			
QVAR	beclomethasone	Decreases the swelling, inflammation and mucous production in the airways associated with asthma; most effective products at preventing hospitalization	No
Azmacort	triamcinolone		No
Aerobid, Aerobid-M	flunisolide		No
Flovent, Flovent Diskus	fluticasone		No
Pulmicort Turbuhaler and Respules	budesonide		No
Combination Products			
Advair	Fluticasone-salmeterol	Contains an inhaled corticosteroid and long acting beta ₂ -agonist	No
Mast Cell Stabilizers			
Intal	cromolyn sodium	Reduces the inflammation that is caused by asthma	Yes, except inhaler
Tilade	nedocromil		No
Long-Acting Beta2-Agonist			
Serevent Diskus	salmeterol	Relaxes the muscle of the lungs so that more oxygen can reach the blood	No
Foradil	fometerol		No
Oral Corticosteroids			
Prednisone, Deltasone, Orasone, etc.	prednisone	Effectively reduces swelling, inflammation and mucous production. These products are used with beta ₂ -agonists and/or ipratropium to treat a severe asthma attack. Long-term use can lead to numerous side effects	Yes, in most strengths
PediaPred, Prelone, Orapred	prednisolone		Yes, in most strengths
Decadron, etc.	dexamethasone		Yes
Cortef	hydrocortisone		Yes, in most strengths
Leukotriene Inhibitors			
Accolate	zafirlukast	Reduce inflammation in the lungs caused by asthma	No
Singular	montelukast		No
Zyflo	zileutin		No
Theophylline			
Slo-Bid, Uniphyl, Theo-Dur, etc.	theophylline	Relax the smooth muscle of the lungs and pulmonary blood vessels	Yes

Formulary and generic products may decrease out-of-pocket expenses, depending on current drug-card benefit design. Check the current formulary list at [PLAN WEB SITE ADDRESS].

Quick Relief or Rescue Medications

There are several medications that can be used during an asthma attack. These medications are known as rescue medications. They are not intended for every day use. Individuals using rescue medications three or more times a week should talk to their doctor about proper use of these products.

QUICK RELIEF OR RESCUE MEDICATIONS			
Common Brand Names	Generic Name	How do they work?	Generic Available?
Beta₂-agonists			
Ventolin, Ventolin HFA	albuterol	Relaxes the muscle of the lungs so that more oxygen can reach the blood.	Yes, Ventolin only
Proventil, Proventil HFA			Yes, Proventil only
Accuneb		Some studies have shown that using these products in excess can actually increase the chance of going to the hospital because of an asthma attack	No
Maxair, Maxair Autohaler	pirbuterol		No
Xopenex	levalbuterol		No
Alupent	metaproterenol		Yes
Anti-cholenergics			
Atrovent Inhaler	ipratropium	Relaxes the muscle of the lungs and also by drying the secretions that can occur in people who have asthma	No
Ipratropium solution for nebulizer	ipratropium		Yes, ipratropium is a generic for nebulizer use only
Combination Product			
Combivent	albuterol- ipratropium	Contains a beta ₂ -agonist and an anti-cholinergic agent	No
Duoneb	albuterol- ipratropium	(see albuterol and ipratropium explanations above)	Yes, as individual nebulizer solutions
Oral Corticosteroids			
Prednisone, Deltasone, Orasone, etc.	prednisone	Effectively reduces swelling, inflammation and mucous production. These products are used with beta ₂ -agonists and/or ipratropium to treat a severe asthma attack. Long-term use can lead to numerous side effects	Yes, in most strengths
PediaPred, Prelone, Orapred	prednisolone		Yes, in most strengths
Decadron, etc.	dexamethasone		Yes
Cortef	hydrocortisone		Yes, in most strengths

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Taking Multiple Medications

In most cases, inhaled medications do not interact with other medications. The inhaled drug goes directly to the lungs and does not reach other parts of the body in quantities large enough to cause a problem. However, if taken frequently or in large doses, inhaled medications can potentially interact with other medications. It is important to talk to a doctor or pharmacist about all medications in a drug regimen to ensure they are safe to be used together.

Summary

- Asthma drug therapy is one of the most important tools in preventing asthma attacks
- Asthma patients who use inhaled corticosteroids regularly are less likely to go to the emergency room, be hospitalized, or die due to a severe asthma attack
- Quick relief or rescue medications are used during an asthma attack
- Taking long-term or controller medications exactly as directed by a doctor is key in preventing asthma attacks

For More Information

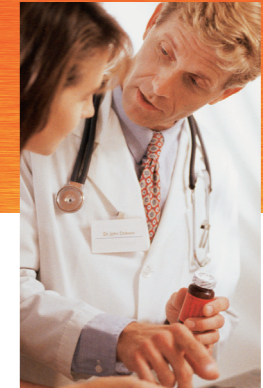
For more information on asthma and its treatments, visit these web sites:

- www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/index.htm
- www.lungusa.org



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The Importance of Asthma Drug Therapy



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