

Asthma Medications



There are three main groups of asthma medications:

Preventers, Relievers and Symptom controllers

1. Preventers

Preventers make the airways less sensitive, reduce the redness and swelling inside the airways, and dry up the mucus. They may take a few weeks to work.

Preventers must be taken daily to keep you well, prevent lung damage and reduce the risk of asthma attacks. Preventer medication containers are normally white or autumn-coloured (i.e. brown, burgundy, yellow or orange). They are called "steroids", much like the ones you produce naturally in your body and are not related to the banned substances that are often referred to in the media.

Preventer medication can be inhaled (breathed in) or taken orally (swallowed). The different types of medications are described below.

*Intal Forte, Tilade**

- Inhaled non-steroids

- May be taken prior to activity to prevent exercise-induced asthma.
- Possible side effects include an unpleasant taste and a cough after inhalation. Reduce these problems by using a spacer with your inhaler then rinsing, gargling and spitting after taking medication.

** The increased stickiness of the CFC-free propellant in Intal Forte and Tilade medications may cause the nozzle to block. Therefore these inhalers should be washed and air-dried daily. Two plastic covers are included in the dispensing pack so that one may be used while the other is drying.*

Singulair (also known as Leukotriene Receptor Antagonists)

- Oral non-steroid (chewable tablets)

- Can be used on their own, or in addition to steroid medication.
- Possible known side effects includes headache and stomach upset.

Flixotide, Pulmicort, Qvar

- Inhaled steroids

- Possible side effects include oral thrush, voice change and sore mouth or throat. Reduce these problems by using a spacer with your inhaler then rinsing, gargling and spitting after taking medication.

Prednisolone, Prednisone, Predmix, Redipred

- Oral steroids (tablets and liquids)

- Take when asthma is severe.
- Usually given for short periods (2-14 days) to quickly improve symptoms.
- Possible side effects include increased appetite and possible weight gain, hyperactivity, mood swings, swollen ankles and fluid retention. When the prescribed course of medication is finished the side effects will decrease.
- A few people with severe persistent asthma may need this medication for longer periods.

Important Points

- **It is important to ask your doctor for advice on any concerns you may have with asthma medications.**
- **Some people may only need preventers for a few months (e.g. during pollen season or winter if colds or 'flu make your asthma worse) while other people need to take preventers all year.**
- **They need to be taken every day at the dosage prescribed by your doctor to be effective.**
- **Preventers take time to work. Do not stop taking your preventer medication after only a few days. An improvement in your symptoms may not be noticed for a couple of weeks.**
- **When you are well (no asthma symptoms and rarely using your blue reliever), talk to your doctor about a review of your medications and written Asthma Action Plan.**

2. Relievers

Relievers provide relief from asthma symptoms within minutes. They relax the muscles around the airways for up to 4 hours, allowing easier breathing. Reliever medication containers are blue in colour.

Important point:

Always carry your blue reliever medication.

Airomir, Asmol, Bricanyl, Epaq, Ventolin

- Inhaled

- Use when you have asthma symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, chest tightness or wheeze).
- Provide quick relief from asthma symptoms as they take only a few minutes to work.
- Keep the airways open for up to 4 hours.
- Used for first aid treatment of asthma.
- Side effects may include "the shakes" and a rapid heart beat, both of which will pass quickly.
- May also be used before activity to prevent exercise-induced asthma.

Ask your doctor for further information if you are prescribed *Atrovent* and *Atrovent Forte* (green containers). These medications:

- Can keep the airways open for up to 6-8 hours.
- Take up to 30 minutes to work.
- Are more commonly used for other lung conditions such as emphysema.
- May cause a dry mouth.

3. Symptom Controllers

Symptom Controllers (also called *Long Acting Relievers*) help to relax the muscles around the airways for up to 12 hours. Symptom Controllers do not provide quick relief from symptoms. They are taken daily and should only be taken by people who are taking regular inhaled "steroid" preventers. Medication containers are usually green in colour.

Foradile, Oxis, Serevent

- Inhaled

- Symptom controllers may be prescribed for people who experience:
 - Symptoms despite treatment with regular inhaled "steroid" preventers
 - Night-time symptoms
 - Exercise induced asthma
- Possible side effects include "the shakes", a rapid heart beat and headaches.

Combination Medications

Combination medications combine a Symptom Controller with a Preventer in the same delivery device. Combination medication containers are purple or red and white

Seretide (Flixotide and Serevent) Symbicort (Pulmicort and Oxis)

- Inhaled

- Side effects are the same as listed for Symptom Controller and Preventer medications.

ASTHMA FIRST AID PLAN

Step 1 Sit the person upright and give reassurance. Do not leave them alone.

Step 2 Without delay give 4 separate puffs of a reliever (*Airomir, Asmol, Bricanyl, Epaq or Ventolin*). The medication is best given one puff at a time via a spacer device*. Ask the person to take 4 breaths from the spacer after each puff of medication.

Step 3 Wait 4 minutes. If there is little or no improvement, repeat steps 2 and 3.

Step 4 If there is still little or no improvement, call an ambulance immediately **DIAL 000.**

Continuously repeat steps 2 and 3 while waiting for the ambulance.

** If a spacer is not available, simply use the puffer on its own, or improvise by cupping your hands over the person's mouth and nose.*

Call 1800 645 130 (office hours)

for professional, confidential and independent information about asthma.

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