

Self-management of asthma

This brief guide summarizes the key areas of self-management in asthma. Other important aspects of asthma self-care include quitting tobacco and nicotine products, maintaining a sufficient and balanced diet and increasing physical activity. Quitting tobacco and nicotine products and engaging in regular physical activity will help improve asthma control.

Self-management

You have a central role in the treatment of your asthma. Your active participation is the key to your wellbeing and well-controlled asthma. Patient should rely on and adhere to education and instructions given by healthcare professionals. This is called guided self-management. The most important parts of asthma self-management are proper use of inhaled medication, non-pharmacological treatments and management of exacerbations.

The goal of asthma treatment

The goal of asthma treatment is to prevent asthma symptoms, exacerbations and prevent long-term structural changes in the bronchial airways, so that you can live as functional and normal life as possible. This is achieved by combining adequate medication with non-pharmacological measures such as quitting smoking, maintaining healthy weight and adequate physical activity. You can ask your doctor or nurse for advice or support in these lifestyle related themes.

Asthma medication

Controller medication aims to prevent asthma symptoms and exacerbations by treating inflammation in the bronchi. Inhaled corticosteroids or combination preparation containing both inhaled corticosteroids and a long-acting bronchodilator can be used as a controller. Continuous daily use of controller medication is essential to achieve treatment goals.

In addition to controller medication, a short acting bronchodilator or a combination preparation containing inhaled corticosteroid and a fast-acting bronchodilator is used as needed to relieve symptoms if they occur. This is called reliever medication.

Controller medication:

Used regularly to prevent symptoms and exacerbations.

Reliever medication:

Used to treat symptoms when they occur.



Inhaler Use

There are two main types of inhalers: Metered-dose inhalers and dry powder inhalers. Instructions vary depending on the type of the inhaler. If possible, use spacer and holding chamber with aerosol inhalers except breath-actuated metered dose inhalers. It is easier to take aerosol with a chamber, and it helps in finding the correct breathing technique.

METERED-DOSE INHALER ("SPRAY") WITH HOLDING CHAMBER

1. Check the dose counter if one exists in your inhaler
2. Shake the inhaler.
3. Remove the cap.
4. Attach the inhaler to the holding chamber.
5. Place the mouthpiece of the holding chamber in your mouth.
6. Press the trigger of your inhaler to release the medication into the chamber.
7. Breathe in and out three to five times through the mouthpiece.

Proper technique in using your inhaler is crucial in managing asthma.
Ask your nurse or doctor for advice on how to use them.

METERED-DOSE INHALER ("SPRAY")

1. Check the dose counter if one exists in your inhaler
2. Shake the inhaler.
3. Remove the cap.
4. Breathe out gently to the side of the inhaler.
5. Place the inhaler in your mouth and breathe in slowly while pressing the inhaler.
6. Hold your breath for 5-10 seconds and breathe out through your nose.

DRY POWDER INHALER (DPI)

1. Check the dose counter if one exists in your inhaler
2. Shake the inhaler.
3. Remove the cap.
4. Load the dose.
5. Breathe out gently to the side of the inhaler.
6. Insert the inhaler into your mouth and take a strong, deep breath in.
7. Hold your breath for 5-10 seconds and breathe out through your nose.

Management of Exacerbations

During an exacerbation, asthma symptoms increase significantly for several days or even weeks. Every asthma patient should have personalized written instructions given by a medical professional for managing exacerbations. Here is some general advice:

- If the symptoms are severe, you for example have continuous shortness of breath or difficult to sleep, seek medical attention at the nearest emergency room or at your doctor's practice. Do not prolong this, because severe asthma attacks can be life-threatening.
- If symptoms are milder, you can usually treat them at home by using reliever medication more than ordinarily but still according to dosage planned by your doctor. Your doctor may also prescribe you a course of oral corticosteroid to be used for more difficult or prolonged symptoms. If your symptoms prolong (for more than 1-2 weeks), visit your doctors practice or local emergency room.