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Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, Texas Chapter, 9101 Quarter Horse Lane
Ft. Worth, TX 76123 817-297-3132 888-933-2232 info@aafatexas.org www.aafatexas.org

HOW TO USE A METERED DOSE INHALER WITH A SPACER

* There is no cure for asthma yet but we can control the symptoms. One way to control symptoms is with the proper medications. **Asthma medications** take many forms: pills, syrups, inhalers, liquids used in a nebulizer. Medications work in different ways (rescue meds and controller meds) and, for many patients, more than one type is usually required. Because everyone's asthma is different, physicians will prescribe different medications at different times to each person.

* Asthma is **classified by severity**. Someone with mild asthma may only need to take medications for a short time when they have symptoms or a flare-up. Patients with severe asthma may need to use several medications daily. Over time, your doctor may change your medications, which is why it's important to visit your physician regularly. **BUT, medication is only effective if it is used correctly.** When you are "in compliance" (using your medications as prescribed), asthma is in control. Your symptoms disappear or decrease and your quality of life improves. If you are using your medications correctly but symptoms aren't improving, then perhaps it's not the right medicine for you. See your healthcare provider if symptoms persist or get worse.

* **MDI's or Metered Dose Inhalers** are a convenient way to deliver the rescue or albuterol medications used for sudden flares. These are canisters of medication with a propellant gas that delivers the medication as a spray or mist. Small, you can take MDI's anywhere and they don't take a lot of time to use. Depressing or pushing down the medication canister **releases a short burst or mist of medicine that is inhaled.** It is highly recommended that a **spacer (valved holding chamber) always be used** with an MDI. **Why use a spacer?**

* Spacers make it **easier for kids** to use an MDI. An MDI releases medicine at a very high speed and the patient has to inhale quickly to absorb the mist. When using a spacer, the drug is discharged into the spacer and held there in suspension for 3-5 seconds longer giving the child more time to inhale the spray and not have to worry about coordinating pressing a canister and then rapidly breathing it in before the mist evaporates into the air. It literally provides "space." Spacers make it possible for small children or persons who have **poor coordination to use MDI's.** Infants and toddlers can use these rescue meds with a spacer plus a mask. Spacers also **reduce medication side effects** like cough or Oral Thrush and help ensure the drug is delivered to the lower airways and not absorbed by the mouth into the stomach instead, which doesn't help asthma but might cause negative side effects. **To use an MDI with a Spacer:**

- 1 – **prime** the MDI if it's new or hasn't been used in several weeks (release 2-3 sprays pointing the canister away from the face but follow manufacturer's directions about priming. Some instruct more priming sprays)
- 2 – **attach** the MDI to the **spacer** and **shake** the MDI well to mix the medication with the propellant
- 3 – standing or at least sitting upright, **exhale fully** (remove any gum or candy from the mouth, too) and tilt head back slightly
- 4 – **press lips** around the spacer's mouthpiece – no gaps between lips and device
- 5 – **press down on the canister 1 time** (this is one puff -never put more than 1 puff in spacer at a time) to release the drug
- 6 – keep the lips sealed around the mouthpiece & **inhale the mist** from the spacer **slowly and deeply**, about 3-5 seconds
- 7 – **hold the breath for 5-10 seconds** (a slow count to 5, such as counting "1 little Indian, 2 little Indians", etc)
- 8 – **exhale slowly through the nose**
- 9 – if a second puff is needed, **wait** about 30 seconds, and then **repeat steps 4-8**
- 10 – **rinse your mouth** with water or brush teeth afterwards to prevent both a residual bad taste and to prevent Thrush

* **Tips:** Only inhale through the spacer and keep a tight seal around the mouthpiece. Parents should supervise the technique. You can't see the medicine in the spacer after 3-5 seconds plus the new HFA inhalers have a softer "burst" of medicine, often tasteless, so the only way to know its done right is to teach the right technique. To get the most medicine into the lungs it's **imperative to inhale slowly and hold the drug in** as long as possible. Be careful not to exhale through the nose while holding in the medication. Infants and toddlers can use a mask with the spacer and MDI. Masks come in different sizes according to age: infant, young child, adult.

* **To use a spacer with a mask**, follow steps 1-2 above but also attach the mask to the spacer. Shake the canister well. **Place the mask over the nose and under the mouth** and make sure there's a **good seal** with no leaks. **Press the MDI once** to release the drug. **Inhale the medication from the mask in 5 to 8 breaths.** Keep the face mask on during both inhalation and exhalation. If it's sealed correctly, you might hear a hollow sound when the valve opens and closes. **Wait** about 30 seconds **then repeat as prescribed.** Remove the mask, **rinse the mouth** with water and wipe the child's face after administering the medication to prevent irritation.

* **Hints for using a mask:** sometimes the child will fight putting the mask on their face. It may help to make a game of it, letting the child get used to the devices first. Distracting them with singing, music or watching a video might help. Ask your healthcare provider first but sometimes it may help to use the mask when the child is sleeping. Next issue: using an MDI without a spacer and using a dry powder inhaler. For more info, contact info@aafatexas.org

Upcoming AAFA-TX programs: **1) March 11** "Asthma & Allergy Essentials for Childcare Providers" Tarrant Cty. United Way, Wilbarger St., Patty Carlton instructor. **2) May 16,** "Applying NHLBI Guidelines to Diagnosing & Managing Asthma, 2009" a CME and ACPE accredited seminar worth 4.5 cat. 1 credits for physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, pharmacy techs, nurses, respiratory therapists. LaQuinta Inn, Arlington. William Lumry, MD, Robert Rogers, MD, Eric Schmitt, MD, William A. Neaville, MD, instructors, Richard Herrscher, MD, moderator. Pre-registration required. For more information and to register, contact info@aafatexas.org

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