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HOW TO USE INHALED ASTHMA MEDICATIONS

* Asthma medications come in many forms. Some are pills, some syrup, some are inhaled through either an **MDI**, (Metered Dose Inhaler – liquid medication propelled with a gas), or **DPI** (Dry Powder Inhaler) and others are liquids used in inhalation machines called nebulizers. A major **part of being in control of your asthma** is to be **“in compliance”** with your medication plan meaning not only using the right medications for your asthma symptoms but also **using this medication correctly** as prescribed. A fast method to absorb asthma medications directly into the airways and to stop asthma symptoms quickly is through an inhalation technique. A difficult technique to learn, with a little practice, anyone can do this correctly.

*The best way to use an MDI or metered dose inhaler is with an added spacer or valved holding chamber. This device is especially beneficial for children or persons with coordination problems yet sometimes it's not possible to use a spacer with the MDI. What is the **best technique to use an MDI without a spacer?** There is a choice of an **‘open mouth’ or ‘closed mouth’** technique. Ask your physician which is best for you to use but the basic steps are the same:

- 1 – **prime** the MDI canister if new or it hasn't been used in several weeks (follow manufacturer's instructions: depress 2-3 sprays or more as directions state, pointing the spray away from the face when priming)
- 2 – remove the cap from the holding chamber's mouthpiece and hold the inhaler upright – check for lint or dirt and clean it
- 3 – **shake the inhaler to mix** the medication with the propellant gas
- 4 – tilt head back slightly and **breathe out** completely
- 5 - if using the **‘open mouth’** method, place the inhaler about **2 fingers' width away from your lips** and opened mouth then press down once on the canister to expel the medication into the air and breathe in as the medication is dispensed
- 6 – if using the **“closed mouth”** method, place your **lips tightly around the mouthpiece** then press down once on the canister to expel the medication into your mouth and inhale slowly – 3-5 seconds
- 7 – with either method, once inhaled, **hold your breathe 5 to 10 seconds** (count 1001, 1002, 1003, etc.)
- 8 – **exhale slowly** through your nose
- 9 - if two puffs or sprays are prescribed, **wait at least 30 seconds**, then repeat steps 4-8
- 10 – **rinse** your mouth with water (spit the water out, never swallow) or brush your teeth to eliminate a bad taste and help prevent oral thrush

* Most MDI's or DPI's don't have a counter to tell you when they're almost empty; it's important to **keep track** of the number of doses or **puffs or sprays** (all mean the same) left so you'll **know when to refill** the prescription. **To help calculate**, ask your pharmacist how many doses, sprays or puffs the new canister holds. If the canister holds 60 sprays and you are prescribed 2 sprays or puffs a day, then your canister will last almost 30 days (don't forget the priming process which uses a couple sprays). If you use 4 sprays or puffs a day, it will last 15 days. A canister that holds 120 sprays or doses lasts 60 days if you use 2 sprays a day but only 15 days if you use 8 sprays a day. To calculate, **divide** the number of prescribed sprays or puffs used daily into the total number available in a new canister which tells you how many days it should last. **Mark your calendar** when you first use the inhaler and calculate when you need a refill and mark that on the calendar too.

* It's very **important to clean your MDI**, especially the new HFA propellant canisters. Please refer to the December 2008 issue of *Air It Out* for detailed directions on the care and cleaning of HFA propelled MDI canisters.

* Some asthma medications are **DPI or Dry Powder Inhalers**. The medications in these are usually **controller** or maintenance drugs. DPI's **don't have a propellant gas**. No spacer is needed but children under 4 or patients with severe lung obstruction have difficulty using them since it requires an ability to generate strong inhaling force to use them.

To use a DPI:

- 1 – **activate** or “load” **the device** according to manufacturer directions. (ask your pharmacist to demonstrate)
- 2 – hold the device so that the medication come straight out facing your mouth, not down toward your feet
- 3 – **breathe out completely**. DO NOT breathe out into the device
- 4 – **seal your lips** around the mouthpiece
- 5 – **inhale very hard and very fast**
- 6 – **hold breath** for about 5-10 seconds (count 1001, 1002, etc.)
- 7 – **exhale** away from the mouthpiece
- 8 – **rinse** your mouth with water – don't swallow the water

* Dry Powder Inhalers should never be stored in a bathroom or kitchen where there is a lot of humidity as the powder will clog. These containers **require little or no cleaning**. As always follow manufacturer directions for use and cleaning.

* It's always a good habit to ask your pharmacist if you should use your asthma medications before, after or with food, or if there are certain foods that should be avoided when taking the medications. Your pharmacist can also demonstrate the proper way to use these asthma medication devices. For more information, contact info@aafatexas.org

Upcoming AAFA-TX programs: **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 Herscher, MD, moderator. Pre-registration required. For more information and to register, contact info@aafatexas.org

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