

# How to Use your Metered-Dose Inhaler the Right Way

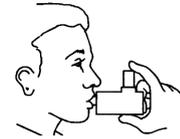


Using a metered-dose inhaler is a good way to take asthma medicines. There are few side effects because the medicine goes right to the airways inside the lungs. A spacer or valved-holding chamber attached to the inhaler can help make your inhaler easier to use and more effective. For patients taking inhaled steroids, a valved-holding chamber or spacer may help prevent irritation to the mouth.

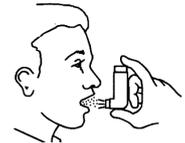
For the next 2 weeks, read these steps aloud as you do them or ask someone to read them to you. Ask your doctor or asthma educator to check how well you are using your inhaler.

Use your inhaler in one of the two ways pictured to the right (A or B).

**A. Preferred:** Use a spacer/holding chamber. These come in many shapes and can be useful to any patient.



**B.** Hold inhaler 1 to 2 inches in front of your mouth (about the width of two fingers).



## STEPS FOR USING YOUR INHALER

### Getting ready

1. Take off the cap and shake the inhaler
2. Breathe out all the way
3. Hold your inhaler the way your doctor or asthma educator said (A or B)

### Breathe in slowly

4. As you start breathing in slowly through your mouth, press down on the inhaler one time. If you are using a spacer or valved-holding chamber, first press down on the inhaler. Within 5 seconds, begin to breathe in slowly.
5. Keep breathing in slowly, as deeply as you can.

### Hold your breath

6. Hold your breath as you count to 10 slowly, if you can.
7. For inhaled quick-relief medicine (beta<sub>2</sub>-agonists), wait about 1 minute between puffs. There is no need to wait between puffs for other medicines.

## Clean Your Inhaler as Needed

The inhaler should be cleaned often to prevent buildup that will clog the inhaler.

1. Once a day, clean the inhaler and cap by rinsing them in warm running water. Let them dry before you use it again.
2. Twice a week wash the plastic mouthpiece with mild dishwashing soap and warm water. Rinse and dry it well before putting it back.

## Know When to Replace Your Inhaler

Many metered-dose inhalers have built-in dose counters that show the number of doses left in the inhaler. Once the counter reaches "0" you will need to replace the inhaler.

If your device does not have a built-in dose counter, follow these steps:

If the canister is new, it is full. The number of puffs a canister contains is listed on the label. Do **NOT** put your canister in water to see if it is empty. This does not work.

For a medicine you take each day: take the number of puffs in the canister when it is full, and divide it by the number of puffs you take every day. This will tell you how many days your inhaler will last. For example:

Your inhaler canister has 200 puffs in it, you are told to take 8 puffs total every day.

$$8 \text{ puffs per day } \overline{) 200 \text{ puffs in canister}} \quad \begin{array}{r} 25 \text{ days} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

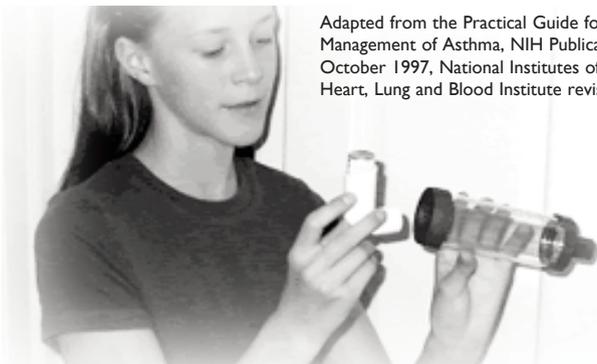
So this canister will last 25 days. If you started using this inhaler on May 1, replace it on or before May 25. You can write the date on your canister.

## For quick-relief medicine

Many metered-dose inhalers have built-in dose counters that show the number of doses left in the inhaler. Once the counter reaches "0" you will need to replace the inhaler.

If your device does not have a built-in dose counter, follow these steps:

Take as needed and count each puff. Check off each puff on a sheet of paper or count the number of puffs used per day and subtract this amount from the total number of doses contained in the inhaler. Write down on a calendar the number of puffs left in the inhaler.



Adapted from the Practical Guide for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma, NIH Publication No. 97-4053, October 1997, National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute revised, 2007.