



MyAsthma

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## Library

### Asthma medicines

There are many different medicines available for the treatment of asthma and most are taken as inhalers. Your healthcare professional will go through the possible treatments with you and together you will agree the ones most suitable for you. Here's a brief description of some of the terms you may hear.

#### Relievers

A reliever medicine, which is usually delivered by a blue inhaler, provides rapid, but short-acting relief of chest tightness and wheezing by relaxing the narrowed airways (known as bronchoconstriction) helping the symptoms of wheeziness and breathlessness.

The most commonly recommended relievers are drugs called short-acting beta-2 agonists. These work within a few minutes to make it easier for you to breathe. There are a number of different reliever inhalers which can be used. Your healthcare professional will advise which is most suitable for you.

Take your reliever with you in case you experience symptoms however relievers shouldn't be needed very often. If you need them most days or are ever waking at night needing them then your asthma is not well controlled and you should have your asthma reviewed by a health professional.

#### Preventers

People with asthma have inflammation of the lining of the air tubes. This inflammation causes irritation and narrowing of these tubes which in turn causes the symptoms of wheezing, tight chest and cough. Preventer medicines are designed to reduce this inflammation in the air tubes, prevent symptoms occurring and prevent asthma attacks.

To achieve this protective effect, they must be taken regularly (usually morning and night though sometimes just once a day), even when you are feeling well as there will nearly always be persisting inflammation in the lungs that will cause problems sooner or later if left untreated. Most people with asthma will be prescribed preventer medicines as they are a cornerstone of treatment. The most widely prescribed preventer medicines are inhaled steroids which usually come in brown, red, or orange inhalers.

Some preventers come in the form of tablets, such as those called leukotriene receptor antagonists (LTRAs), and theophylline. Sometimes steroid tablets (e.g. prednisolone) are required to treat badly controlled asthma.

#### Other medicines

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If your asthma is not well controlled with your regular preventer, your healthcare professional may suggest using additional, or add-on, therapy such as a long-acting bronchodilator to help you get your control get back on track. There are also combined therapies which are both preventer and bronchodilator medication. Other types and formats of medicine are available to help your healthcare professional give you the most appropriate treatment for your needs.

### Side effects

Many people are concerned about the side effects of asthma medication, particularly if it is taken over a long period of time. There has been a lot of research into the benefits and side effects of asthma medicines, and overall the benefit of using them has been shown to outweigh the risks from their use in those who need them.

The steroids used in many preventer inhalers at the doses most people use do not cause addiction, do not lose their effects over time or cause an increase in weight. The majority of people with asthma only require low doses of inhaled steroids which are unlikely to cause serious side-effects around the body. Sometimes regular inhaled steroids can have effects on the mouth and lead to mouth ulcers or oral thrush, but this can usually be avoided by simple measures such as rinsing the mouth after using the inhaler or by using a spacer device (<https://myasthma.com/en/library/view/21>).

As the dose of a treatment increases so does the possible risk of side effects however high doses are only rarely needed and only become necessary if your asthma is not well controlled. Your healthcare professional will work with you to maintain good control and keep your medication at the lowest possible dose.

The patient information leaflet you receive with your asthma treatment has detailed information about side-effects. If you are concerned about particular side effects or think that a treatment is causing a side effect speak to your healthcare professional for advice.

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