

## Chapter Seven: Use Your Breathing Aids

Several kinds of devices are used to treat chronic lung disease. Most of them help put medicines, oxygen, or moist air deep into the lungs and help clear mucus out of your airways.

Perhaps you're wondering if you should be using a breathing aid. If you know what each kind is for and how it works, you'll be able to discuss your needs with your doctor.

If you're already using one of the devices, this information may help you get more benefit from it.

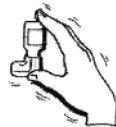
### Inhalers and Nebulizers

An inhaler is a sprayer made to deliver a dose of medicine that you can breathe deeply into your lungs. In a metered-dose inhaler, the medicine comes packaged in a spray container. Nebulizers plug into electric outlets in the wall and operate with compressed air or oxygen.

If your doctor orders a nebulizer, a nurse or a respiratory therapist should show you how to use and clean it. Tell your doctor if you feel you need nebulizer treatments more often than they're prescribed.

Here are some steps to follow when using a handheld nebulizer:

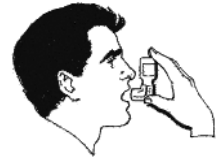
1. Assemble your device for use.



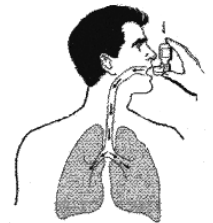
2. Empty your lungs by breathing out slowly through pursed lips.



3. Put the end of the nebulizer into your mouth, just past your front teeth.



4. Keep your mouth open so that you can breathe in extra air. That helps carry the medicine deep into your airways.



5. After each inhalation, hold your breath for at least a few seconds. This lets your medicine settle deeply in the airways.
6. Breathe out slowly.
7. Stop to cough up mucus.
8. Repeat as often as your doctor directs.



Here are some steps to follow when using an inhaler:

1. Remove the cap from the mouthpiece. Shake the entire unit.
2. Breathe out completely.
3. Hold the inhaler properly by placing your index finger on the top of the metal canister and your thumb on the bottom of the plastic mouthpiece. Place the inhaler one or two inches away from your mouth.
4. Press the top of the canister down firmly. At the same time, inhale deeply and slowly through your mouth.
5. Continue to inhale deeply. Hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds.

6. Release the canister and remove the canister from your mouth. Breathe out slowly.
7. If your doctor has ordered more than one puff, wait at least 1 minute before the next puff. This allows the first puff to open your airways, enabling the second puff to penetrate more deeply.
8. Repeat above steps for each puff.
9. Do not increase the number or frequency of puffs without asking your physician.

#### Care of your inhaler

1. Wash your inhaler thoroughly at least once a day. The mouthpiece may get blocked unless cleaned daily.
2. Remove the metal canister and rinse the mouthpiece and cap in warm water.
3. Dry thoroughly.
4. Do not puncture or destroy your inhaler by fire because its contents are under pressure. Do not store or use near heat or open flame.

Rinse your mouth with water or mouthwash after using your nebulizer or inhaler. Swallowing the medicine could upset your stomach.

Ask your doctor to advise you about what approach is best for you. Your doctor and pharmacist may also provide a “spacer”, if needed that extends your inhaler to help you deliver more medicine into your airways.

#### Oxygen

If there is too little oxygen in your blood, your doctor may order oxygen equipment for you to use at home.

Oxygen is a medicine. You need to take the right amount at the right times. To do that, you need to understand how to use the equipment that delivers the oxygen to your lungs. If you're using oxygen equipment at home, a nurse, therapist,

or technician should show you:

- How to use the equipment.
- How to take care of it.
- How to tell when it's time to order more.

Your doctor will tell you:

- What kind of equipment to use.
- What flow rate you should set it at.
- When to use it and for how long.

Never set the flow rate higher or use oxygen more than what your doctor prescribes. Too much oxygen can damage your lungs and even slow your breathing.



**For Safety:** Your oxygen tank will not explode or burn. Oxygen does not burn, but it does help other things burn faster.

#### To prevent fires:

- There should be no smoking in the room where oxygen is being used.
- Keep the tank at least 10 feet from an open flame, gas stoves, pilot lights in water heaters and furnaces, and wood-burning stoves.
- Keep the tank at least 10 feet from electrical equipment that may spark.

#### Humidifiers and Vaporizers

If your fluid intake is not adequate, dry air can make the mucus in your lungs sticky and hard to cough up. When mucus stays in your lungs, it clogs your airways and supplies a place for infections to grow.

A humidifier or a vaporizer puts moisture in the air. When you breathe in, it helps soften and loosen the mucus. Then you can cough it up. However, a humidifier or vaporizer can also become a place where germs grow. The equipment must be cleaned carefully, at least once a week, according to the directions that come with it.

Note: The best way to thin mucus is to drink more fluids. A humidifier or vaporizer may not be necessary unless your doctor limits your fluid intake. Ask your doctor to be sure.

### **Other equipments**

Other kinds of equipment are sometimes used at home. They should be used only with your doctor's approval.

- Air filters or purifiers may be useful, especially if you live in an area of high pollution or if allergies complicate your lung disease. However, many of these devices produce ozone, a gas you should not breathe. Check with your doctor and medical equipment supplier before buying one.

- Electric vibrators or percussors may be recommended if chest vibration is part of your home physical therapy routine and if your home-helper is unable to do it without one.
- A suction apparatus is used to remove mucus after some kinds of surgery and in some cases when other treatments fail to remove mucus.

Before you buy: Ask your doctor's advice before spending your money on any device to treat your lung disease. Some products being advertised are not helpful and may be dangerous for you, and insurance companies will not pay for devices you buy without a prescription.

If your doctor prescribes a breathing aid, shop as you would for a new power tool or washing machine. Ask suppliers about prices and especially about service. Find out how they handle the need for repairs and replacement parts.