

Asthma medicines

There are two main types of medicine:

1. Rescue or quick relief medicine
 - a. Bronchodilators
 - b. Steroids (liquid or pills)
2. Controller or preventive medicine
 - a. Inhaled steroids
 - b. Leukotrienes

Rescue medicine

Bronchodilators

How they work:

They work by relaxing the muscles around the airways so air can move in and out easier.

When to use them:

Rescue medicines are used during an asthma episode to relieve coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. You should start these at the first sign of a cold. This medicine will be listed in your yellow zone of your asthma action plan.

If exercise is one of your triggers, you may also be instructed to use this medicine 10-15 minutes before exercise to prevent coughing and/or shortness of breath during exercise.

Side effects:

You may notice a fast heartbeat or a jittery feeling. Often, these side effects go away after using the medicine for a while. Call your doctor if the side effects bother you or don't go away.

Steroid (Liquid or pills)

How they work:

They work by decreasing swelling and mucus inside the airways. They start to work in about 6-12 hours.

When to use them:

This medicine may be taken during an asthma episode when the rescue medicine alone is not helping. This medicine will be listed in the red zone of your asthma action plan.

Side effects:

You may notice an increase in appetite, stomachache or feeling more hyper.

Take this medicine with food to help prevent side effects. The goal is to be on this medicine no more than two times per year.

Controller medicine

Inhaled steroids

How they work:

They work by reducing swelling and mucus. They are the best medicine for controlling asthma. They are not the muscle-building steroids and are safe to use every day. Because they are inhaled into the lungs and not swallowed they have fewer side effects than the oral steroid medicine.

When to use them:

They must be taken every day, even when you are healthy to control your asthma and prevent asthma episodes.

Side effects:

Side effects may be hoarseness and possible yeast infection in your mouth. Use a spacer with your inhaler and rinse and spit after using this medicine to prevent side effects.

Leukotrienes

How they work:

They work by reducing swelling and mucus.

When to use them:

They must be taken every day, even when you are healthy to control your asthma and prevent asthma episodes. This medicine is a pill and should be taken in the evening.

Side effects:

Headache, stomachache or changes in behavior may be side effects. You should let your doctor know if you have these symptoms.

Medicine tips:

- Be sure to have refills for your medicine (don't run out).
- Have a rescue inhaler at home and at school/daycare.
- Keep your medicine in sight and work it into your daily routine so you remember to take it.
- Follow your asthma action plan.