

About Asthma Medicines

Asthma medicines keep the air tubes in your lungs open. There are two groups of asthma medicines:

- **Bronchodilators** are medicines that help to *stop* asthma attacks after they've started and can help prevent expected attacks, as from exercise.
- **Anti-inflammatories** are medicines that help to control the airway inflammation and *prevent* asthma attacks from starting.

These medicines are sold under many brand names. They come in different forms, too. They can include sprays, pills, powders, liquids and shots. The doctor chooses the medicine and form that will work best for you.

Let's take a closer look at how these medicines can help you.

Bronchodilators give you relief during an asthma attack. These medicines work to relax the muscles in your air tubes. As this happens, your air tubes open up, making it easier for you to breathe.

Anti-inflammatories, on the other hand, work to keep your air tubes open all of the time so that you don't have an asthma attack in the first place. These medicines reduce the swelling in your air tubes and decrease the mucus. *Cromolyn* and *nedocromil* are two examples of anti-inflammatory medicines.

Another example is *corticosteroids*. When you hear the word "steroid" you might think of the steroids used by athletes. This may worry you if you have heard about the problems and side effects athletes have when taking steroids. But corticosteroids are not the steroids used by athletes. Those steroids are called "anabolic steroids."

Remember that corticosteroids are used to help prevent asthma attacks from starting. When you take this medicine in a spray form, the risk of serious side effects is very little.

The chance of serious side effects increases when these medicines are taken in a pill or liquid form over a

long period. In that case, you need to get regular check-ups by a doctor to make sure that the medicine works the best way for you.

Let's talk about side effects for a moment. Every kind of medicine, even aspirin, can have some side effects. But a doctor can help you by finding ways to control side effects.

When it comes to asthma medicines, it is important to check regularly with a doctor to make sure that these medicines are helping you.

Sometimes you may have some side effects, such as a sore throat, nervousness, nausea, rapid heartbeat, loss of appetite, or staying awake. Tell a doctor if you feel this way. The doctor may want to change your dose, or try a different asthma medicine.

The purpose of asthma medicines is to help you feel better and control your asthma so that you can do what you want to do without asthma getting in your way.

One final note on medicines. There is another kind of treatment that may be helpful to you if your asthma attacks get started by allergies. This treatment is called hyposensitization therapy or allergy shots. These shots may be helpful to you in preventing your asthma attacks. Not all experts agree about the usefulness of allergy shots. On the other hand, the kinds of things that you do are just as important as the kinds of medicines that you take. You can help yourself when you try to avoid or get rid of the things that make you allergic, such as dust, feathers or animal fur. By doing this, you really take control and make it possible for your asthma medicines to work successfully