



Frequently Asked Questions

Inhaled Steroid MEDICATIONS for Treatment of Asthma

Q What are inhaled steroid medications?

A Inhaled steroids are long-term medications people take every day to treat persistent asthma. People with persistent asthma have symptoms like wheezing, coughing, or chest tightness more than two times a week, or they wake up during the night due to asthma symptoms more than two times a month.

Inhaled steroid medications can:

- control airway inflammation (swelling);
- reduce asthma symptoms and flare-ups;
- decrease asthma attacks.

Most people with persistent asthma need to take long-term control medications every day. It takes a few weeks for the medications to take full effect. Long-term inhaled steroid medications should not be used to treat asthma attacks. They do not help with symptoms in flare-ups. Quick acting medications, also called rescue drugs, should be used in a flare-up.

Q Is it safe to take inhaled steroids?

A Inhaled steroids are safe. Most people take the medication in small doses so only very small amounts are absorbed into the body. It is rare for inhaled steroids to cause the side effects that may be caused by steroids taken in liquid or pill form, or by injection. Side effects that are more often seen with inhaled steroids include:

- dry or sore mouth, sore throat, hoarseness;
- cough;
- white patches in the mouth or throat (thrush).

Q How do I prevent or reduce the side effects of inhaled steroid medication?

A To reduce or prevent side effects of inhaled steroids:

- Talk to your doctor about using a spacer. A spacer is a plastic tube that attaches to the inhaler and helps more medication get into your lungs.
- Rinse your mouth with water and gargle after using inhaled steroid medication. This will help prevent thrush. Do not swallow the water.
- Ask your doctor about taking the lowest dose needed to control your symptoms.
- If you are having problems with side effects, talk to your doctor about decreasing the inhaled steroid dose. Your doctor may add other medications to be taken with the steroid.

Q Why would I take medications every day when I don't feel sick?

A Inhaled steroid medications reduce inflammation in your airways, making it easier to get air into your lungs. Inflammation comes on slowly, and if you wait until you feel tight or short of breath, it is harder to treat.

Q How do I know if my asthma is out of control?

A Some things to look for include:

- coughing, wheezing, or tightness in the chest or back when you breathe;
- increased use of your rescue inhaler (short-acting inhaler);
- a drop in the number on your peak flow meter;
- waking at night with trouble breathing or a restless feeling;
- an increase in your usual symptoms or frequency of asthma attacks;
- breathing problems even when you are using your inhaled steroid;
- normal activities become more difficult.

Q I've taken my inhaled steroid for a long time. Will I need to take it forever?

A Only your doctor will be able to tell you when you can reduce or stop taking your medications. Here are some things you can do that may reduce the need for your medications:

- Monitor your breathing and have regular checkups with your doctor.
- Avoid things that trigger your asthma. Your doctor may consider allergy testing to determine what substances may cause an asthma attack.
- Avoid irritants, such as cigarette smoke, that make you cough or feel short of breath.
- Make sure that conditions like sinusitis, nasal polyps, or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) are being treated.

Q My controller medication is expensive. How can I spend less for my prescriptions?

A Ask your doctor about:

- generic medications (less expensive versions of brand-name medications);
- other medications that are just as effective but less expensive;
- patient assistance programs that offer low-cost medications to low-income people.

Ask Independence Blue Cross (IBC) about:

- covered medication costs;
- preferred or generic medications;
- copay amounts;
- participating pharmacies.

You may also use a mail order service that usually sends more than one month's supply at a lower cost to you. Visit www.ibxpress.com for more information about your IBC pharmacy coverage.

Make sure your pharmacist knows your medical history and all the medications that you are taking (prescription and non-prescription, herbs, and dietary supplements). Also ask your pharmacist about possible medication interactions and side effects.

ConnectionsSM Health Management Program
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