

***I have a
metered dose inhaler.
How do I use it
correctly?***

The key to using all inhaled medications is proper technique. Here are some steps for ensuring that every puff you take of your MDI inhaler delivers the most medication possible into your lungs, rather than to the back of your throat.

1. Firmly place the metal container into the mouthpiece. *Remove* the cap and vigorously *shake* the inhaler.
2. Breathe out only to the end of a normal breath (not a forced breath).
3. Position the mouthpiece end of the inhaler about 4 cm (2-3 fingerbreadths) from your mouth.
4. Open your mouth widely and tilt back your head slightly. (Another way of doing this is to close your lips around the mouthpiece, keeping teeth apart and tongue flat so the medication can flow freely into the lungs.)
5. At the same time that you start to breathe in slowly, depress the metal container into the mouthpiece to release one puff of medication.
6. Continue breathing in slowly until your lungs are full (about 5 seconds).

- Once you have breathed in fully, *hold* your breath for 10 seconds (or as long as comfortable).
- If you need a second puff, wait about one minute before repeating the above steps.

Is my inhaler full?

One test is to hold the canister next to your ear and shake it several times. If it's full, you'll hear and feel the contents, which are in liquid form, swishing back and forth. Another method is to keep track of the number of puffs you take in a notebook. You could also plan the length of use based on the prescribed puffs per day: For example, using 2 puffs, 2 times a day would mean your inhaler would need replacing in 50 days. Most canisters contain 200 puffs. It's a good practice to keep a spare inhaler on hand.

Special instructions for children

Most children under the age of 9 cannot use an MDI properly. For these children, a spacer should be used with the MDI. Regardless of the child's age, spacers are recommended when a *steroid inhaler* is used, to reduce the risk of developing a yeast infection in the mouth of throat.

Hints

If you see a mist escaping from the mouth during the inhalation of the MDI, it means the technique must be improved. When you visit your health care provider, ask them to check your technique. If your technique is not very good, the medication is not delivered as well as it should be into your lungs. Most of the medication may be landing on the back of your throat or escaping through your mouth. Excellent technique is important so be sure to have your technique checked regularly.

Rinse the plastic holder of the MDI regularly with warm tap water. Remove the canister from the plastic holder before rinsing. Let it dry thoroughly before replacing the canister.

How to use a metered dose inhaler with a spacer

Some people, no matter how hard they try, still have trouble coordinating an MDI. Fortunately, there are spacers (holding chambers), which hold the medication for a few seconds after it has been released from the inhaler. Your doctor may recommend one if you have trouble with an MDI or are on inhaled steroids. Spacers may also reduce side effects like a hoarse voice or sore throat if you're taking higher doses of inhaled steroids. Spacers can be used with most aerosol inhalers and are very easy to use.

1. Remove the plastic cap from the inhaler mouthpiece and spacer mouthpiece.
2. Insert the inhaler mouthpiece into the large opening of the spacer.

3. Hold the spacer and inhaler together and shake well.
4. Breathe out.
5. Put the mouthpiece of the spacer into your mouth, close your lips around it – do not cover the small slots.
6. Press the metal canister down into the inhaler to spray the medication into the spacer. Then, breathe in slowly and deeply through your mouth (for about five seconds).
7. Keep holding your breath for as long as you comfortably can (about 10 seconds).
8. Breathe out slowly through your mouth or nose.
9. If more puffs are prescribed, wait one minute then repeat the steps starting from # 3.

Caring For Your Spacer

Spacers need weekly cleaning because repeated use will cause powder to collect inside the spacer. To clean, run warm tap water through the large opening. Shake off excess water and allow it to air-dry overnight.

Have more questions?

- Contact The Lung Association's Asthma Action Help Line at **1-800-668-7682** and speak to a Certified Asthma Educator.
- Order a free copy of The Lung Association's Asthma Action Handbook by calling **1-800-668-7682**
- Check out The Lung Association's website: www.lung.ca