

# Asthma Treatments

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## **Bronchodilators (Relievers)**

These drugs help by making the tight muscles around the airways relax, they work very quickly (within minutes) and their effect usually lasts 4-6 hours. They offer instant relief from the tight chested feeling, and difficulty in breathing that Asthmatics get. There are two types of bronchodilator drugs, short acting – those that last 4-6 hours per dose, and long acting – those that last 12 hours per dose. All the short acting bronchodilators are blue, whether they are inhalers or other devices, the most commonly prescribed are Salbutamol and Terbutaline. These are made by several drug companies, so patients may find that they are often given an Inhaler with a different brand name. As long as it is blue it contains the same drug as you are used to. If someone is Asthmatic and feeling short of breath, the blue inhaler is the only one that will help them there and then. We call them relievers.

When you come to the Asthma clinic you will be asked how often you need to use your blue inhaler. This is not a trick question! It gives us a good idea of how inflamed (swollen) your airways are and we can adjust your treatment accordingly.

## **Steroids (Preventers)**

Using tiny doses of steroids delivered straight to the inflamed linings of the airways reduces the inflammation that causes the breathing difficulties. Because steroid inhalers reduce inflammation and return airways to normal, we call them 'preventers' as they soothe the inflammation that leads to tight narrow airways, which in turn cause asthma attacks.

Steroid inhalers are generally brown, or orange, but can on occasions be a different colour, eg white or purple. The most commonly prescribed steroid inhalers are Beclometasone, Fluticasone and Budesonide. Steroid inhalers are slow acting; it usually takes 5-7 days before patients start to really feel the difference. This is because we use small doses. If the Asthma is causing serious difficulties with breathing, you will be given a short course of steroid (prednisolone) tablets. This is a much larger dose – about the equivalent of 30 puffs a day of a standard brown inhaler, but it will reduce the inflammation very quickly. Taking these tablets for 5-7 days does not cause serious side effects, though taking them for weeks or months certainly could.

When you come to the Asthma clinic we will help you to decide what dose of steroid inhaler, if any that you need. Most of our patients adjust the dose they are taking, according to the amount of symptoms they have. Using the right treatment before the symptoms get out of control means that most asthmatics don't need to take high doses of their steroid inhalers, and are often able to stop taking them for long periods of time. Patients often only get symptoms during the hay fever season, or in autumn when there are many mould spores in the air. By using their inhaler to treat the inflammation quickly, they can save themselves from months of symptoms.