How to Use an Inhaler

Metered-dose inhalers deliver a specific amount of medicine in an aerosol form, so you can inhale the medicine instead of taking a pill.

Inhalers sold since January 1, 2009 have the same medicine but use a new propellant, hydrofluoroalkane (HFA for short). You should prime your new HFA inhaler the first time you use it, or if you haven’t used it in two weeks, or if it has been dropped. Check the instructions for your specific inhaler, but here are some general guidelines:

**Priming:** After shaking the inhaler, if you need to prime it, point it away from you and spray. Repeat shaking and spraying three or four times.

**Spacer:** You may want to use a spacer, a tube that carries medicine from the inhaler directly to the mouth. A spacer lets patients breathe at their own pace and helps deliver the medicine deep into the airways. Spacers are especially helpful for young children and people taking corticosteroids.

If you’re using a spacer, attach the spacer to the inhaler.
If you’re using a spacer, put one hand around the spacer and one hand on the inhaler, and place your mouth firmly around the end of the spacer.

If you’re not using a spacer, place the mouthpiece into your mouth and close your lips around it tightly.

Breathe in deeply as you press down as far as you can on the top of the canister. After the spray comes out, take your finger off the canister. When you have inhaled as much as you can in one breath, take the inhaler out of your mouth and close your mouth. Hold your breath as long as you can, up to 10 seconds, then breathe normally.

If your doctor has prescribed more than one spray, wait one minute, shake the inhaler, and repeat the process, starting with exhaling as much air as you can.

If you’re using a corticosteroid, rinse your mouth out after each use; this will help lessen your risk of developing yeast infections in your throat. Be sure not to swallow the water, since that could increase the risk of side effects.

Dry-powder inhaler: Do not use a spacer. Put your mouth around the mouthpiece tightly and inhale quickly and deeply.