

What is a spacer?

FACT SHEET prepared by The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ

A spacer is a plastic cylinder, designed to make a metered dose inhaler (MDI) easier to use.

MDIs contain medications that are inhaled. Instead of inhaling directly from the inhaler, a dose from the inhaler is puffed into the spacer then the spacer is inhaled from, either through a mouthpiece or a mask. The spacer helps deliver the medicine to the airways of the lungs instead of the mouth and therefore increasing the effectiveness of the medication by up to 70 percent. As many adults and most children cannot coordinate very well with their inhaler, using a spacer is recommended for everyone who is using a metered dose inhaler, especially preventer medications.

Why should I use a spacer?

- ❖ It is far easier to use an inhaler with a spacer than an inhaler alone as you do not need to coordinate your hand and breathing
- ❖ You can breathe in and out several times with a spacer, so if your lungs aren't working very well you don't have to get all the medicine on one breath only
- ❖ The spacer reduces the amount of medicine from the inhaler hitting the back of your mouth and throat rather than going to your lungs. This reduces the local side effects from preventer medication in your mouth and throat – sore throat, hoarse voice and oral thrush. It also means that less medicine is swallowed and then absorbed from the intestine into the rest of the body. (You should still always rinse your mouth out or clean your teeth after using your preventer medication)
- ❖ A spacer ensures you get more of the medicine you inhale into the lungs where it does the most good. This means that you may also be able to reduce the amount of medicine you need to take. If you use an inhaler without a spacer very little medication may actually get to the lungs
- ❖ A spacer is as effective as a nebuliser for getting the medicine to your lungs, in an acute asthma attack but it is faster to use than a nebuliser, and less expensive

How do I use a spacer?

- ❖ Shake the inhaler
- ❖ Fit the inhaler into spacer opening (opposite the mouthpiece) and put the spacer into your mouth ensuring that there are no gaps around the mouthpiece
- ❖ OR place the mask on your child's face, covering the mouth and nose ensuring there are no gaps. Most children should be able to use the spacer without a mask by the age of three years
- ❖ Press the inhaler once only — one puff at a time into the spacer
- ❖ Breathe in slowly and deeply through the spacer mouthpiece and hold your breath for 5-10 seconds
- ❖ OR take 2-6 normal breaths keeping the spacer in your mouth all of the time – You can breathe in and out with the spacer still in your mouth as most spacers have small vents to allow your breath to escape rather than going into the spacer
- ❖ If you need more than one dose of medication wait one minute and then repeat these steps for further doses making sure that you shake your inhaler between doses
- ❖ If using a mask with preventer medication wash the child's face after use
- ❖ Wash your spacer once a week and before using it for the first time with warm water and dishwashing liquid. Don't rinse. Drip dry. This reduces the electrostatic charge so that the medicine does not stick to the spacer sides
- ❖ Check for cracks. If used regularly your spacer may need to be replaced every 12-24 months

How do I get a spacer?

Spacers are available free of charge from your general practitioner or respiratory educator.

For local supply information or to purchase contact Air Flow Products on free phone:

0800 AIRFLOW (247 3569)

The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ can help you

The Asthma and Respiratory Foundation is New Zealand's not-for-profit sector authority on asthma and other respiratory illnesses. We advocate to government and raise awareness of respiratory illnesses, fund research for better treatments and educate on best practice.

Check out our comprehensive website at asthmaandrespiratory.org.nz