

Tell Me Again When to Use Albuterol?

by Doug Puder, MD

Asthma is caused by inflammation in the airways and narrowing called **bronchospasm**. It causes shortness of breath, wheezing, and cough. *Albuterol* is a fast acting **bronchodilator**. So it stimulates the bronchial tubes to open by relaxing the muscles wrapping around them.

Should I give albuterol when my child is not coughing?

No. It is not a controller of asthma. It should only be used to relieve wheezing or asthmatic shortness of breath. When your child seems fine, don't use it. It can be used every four hours for wheezing.

What if my child uses albuterol more than twice a week?

If your child needs albuterol more than twice a week for shortness of breath or wheezing, call us. This can be a sign that your child's asthma is not well controlled. It tells us that your child may need a controller medication as well. That doesn't mean you should stop using albuterol, but we need to start additional anti-inflammatory medication.

Does that include albuterol before sports?

No, with sports induced asthma, albuterol can be given about 15 minutes prior to participation. Pre-sports albuterol is not a sign of poor asthma control.

Should I use a spacer (aerochamber, etc)?

Children younger than eight will get much more of their HFA inhaler medication into their lungs if they use a spacer device. Even many tweens do better with a spacer. Under age five we recommend spacers with a mask, after age five the mask is not necessary. New dry powder inhalers do not need any spacers attached as they are breath activated.

Do all the albuterol brands have the same color?

No! It would make sense and be less confusing. There are two major albuterol brands now: *Ventolin* (grey-blue color) and *ProAir* (bright red color). *ProAir Respiclick* (white with a red top) is a dry powder breath activated inhaler.

Is a nebulizer better?

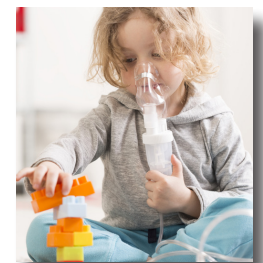
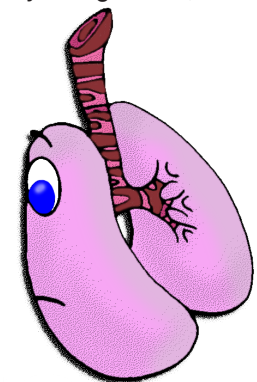
Albuterol by nebulizer may give a slightly higher albuterol dose than an inhaler does. Otherwise there is no difference. We find many toddlers do better with a nebulizer, but generally prefer the inhalers with a spacer after age three to four. A nebulizer can help during a major asthma attack, but is not often needed otherwise and it does **not** improve asthma control.

When should I be adding a controller medication to albuterol?

If your child has needed prednisone to control asthma or if there have been more than two asthma flares in the past year, we should discuss adding controller medication. If there is frequent shortness of breath, night wheezing or deep coughing, or if asthma keeps your child from activities let's discuss controller medication.

Why don't I get refills on albuterol prescriptions?

Some doctors find it useful to monitor how often you are refilling your albuterol. It gives us information about your child's controller needs.



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