USING INHALERS

People who have asthma, bronchitis, or other lung conditions often take prescribed medications through an inhaler—a device that releases the medication in a spray so that it reaches its target—the lungs. Studies show that up to 94 percent of patients use inhalers incorrectly and therefore fail to get the full benefit from the medication. If not used correctly, the medicine stays in the person’s mouth or goes into the air. This video, one of a series produced by the Home Alone Alliance™, is designed to help family caregivers like you make sure your family member or friend uses the inhaler correctly.

The video shows a couple following instructions on the package insert for the inhaler to learn how to use it. Since inhalers come in many different forms, it’s important to ask your health care provider or pharmacist for any special instructions.

Inhalers contain either short-acting or long-acting medicines. Short-acting inhalers are called rescue inhalers because they work quickly. Short-acting inhalers are used as needed for quick relief for trouble breathing. Long-acting inhalers are used daily or twice a day as ordered. If your family member has more than one inhaler, be sure you know which one has the “rescue” medicine and which one has the “maintenance” medicine.

Using the Inhaler

Some inhalers administer the medication with the aid of a spacer—a tube that attaches to the inhaler and holds the medication until the person can breathe it in. This type of inhaler should be shaken for 5 to 10 seconds before use.

In this video the inhaler is activated by pressing a button and turning the inhaler until you hear a click. You can help by reminding the person to follow these steps:

> Take a deep breath and exhale fully.
> Close your lips tightly around the inhaler.
> Press down to release the medication.
> Breathe in slowly in as deep as you can through your mouth for about five seconds.
> Close your mouth while holding your breath for five to ten seconds.
> Exhale slowly through your mouth.
> If your health care provider advises using two puffs, wait one minute before taking the second puff. The first puff may make you cough. If it does, wait until coughing subsides before taking the second puff.
> Finally, rinse your mouth with water.

Breathing deeply and slowly is the key to getting the medication to the lungs.

Additional Resources

The American Lung Association has videos demonstrating the use of inhalers of various kinds. Go to www.lung.org/search/#stq=videos%20on%20using%20inhalers&stp=1.

WebMD also has information on using inhalers, including rescue inhalers used in cases of breathing distress. Go to www.webmd.com/asthma/guide/when-to-use-inhaler#1.

There are many other videos and resource guides in this series. Go to www.aarp.org/nolongeralone for a complete listing.

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