

Getting the Most Out of Medication Delivery Devices

Medications play a vital role in managing lung disease, but they must be used correctly to get the right amount of medication into the lungs. Common challenges with these devices include hand-breath coordination (the activation of the inhaler and timing of the breath) and confusing priming and loading instructions.

Talk to your patients about their concerns using their medication and assess their inhaler technique at every visit. For patients with poor inhaler technique, consider switching to a new medication delivery device when possible.

How-To Videos



	Meter Dose Inhaler	Dry Powder Inhaler	Slow Mist Inhaler	Nebulizer
Type of device	Hand-held device that delivers medication as an aerosol with propellant	Hand-held inhaler that holds the medicine as a dry powder	Hand-held inhaler that releases medication in a fine mist	A machine that changes medication from a liquid to a mist
Inhalation technique	Breathe in steady and deeply	Breathe in quickly and deeply Hold horizontally	Breathe in steady and deeply Hold horizontally	Normal breathing pattern using a mask or mouthpiece
Portable and compact	Yes	Yes	Yes	Portable options are available May require power outlet
Ease of breath-hand coordination	Breath-hand coordination required	Less breath-hand coordination, however, requires one's ability to breathe in quickly and deeply <small>*See medication insert for minimum inspiratory needs</small>	Less breath-hand coordination required	N/A
Built in dose counter	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Recommended use of a valved holding chamber (VHC)/spacer	Yes	No	No	N/A
Time spent using medication	Short. Less than 2 minutes to deliver medicine	Short. Less than 2 minutes to deliver medicine	Short. Less than 2 minutes to deliver medicine	Long. May take approximately 10 to 30 minutes to deliver medicine
Cleaning	Weekly* (including VHC/spacer)	Weekly* <small>*Never use water on a dry powder inhaler</small>	Weekly*	Daily* Wash mask, mouthpiece and t-shaped part of the cup
Set up and maintenance	Shake before each use and prime the inhaler when new Reprime the inhaler after period of inactive use‡	Do not shake or prime the inhaler	Load cartridge to device and prime for first-time use Reprime the inhaler after period of inactive use‡	Do not shake or prime the device Nebulizer and accessories may need to be set up prior to use Change filter, tubing, and accessories*

‡Check the device's instructions or talk with the prescriber or pharmacist on when to prime and reprime the device.

*Follow manufacturer's instructions.

This tool provides general medication delivery device guidance and does not include every medication delivery device. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Watch videos and download patient handouts for step-by-step instructions about using COPD and asthma medication and devices at [Lung.org/lung-health-diseases](https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases).