



What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease that affects the airways in the lungs. If you have asthma, your lungs are very sensitive. When you have an asthma attack, muscles tighten in your airways making it hard to breathe. For some people this can be triggered by something that irritates their lungs.

How can I control my asthma?

The best way to control your asthma is to avoid things that make your asthma symptoms worse. If you have asthma symptoms more than twice a week, you might also need to talk to your doctor about taking a long-term control medication. Long-term control medications can be taken every day, to prevent symptoms.

What can make my asthma symptoms worse?

Things in your environment can make your asthma symptoms worse, including: cold air; exercise; some types of viral infections and things that cause allergies such as dust mites, mold, pollen or animal dander.

What are my medication options for treating asthma?

Your options include:

Rescue medications: Use for immediate relief during an asthma attack.

- The most common rescue medication is **albuterol** which is a generic alternative for Maxair[®], ProAir[®], Proventil HFA[®], and Ventolin HFA[®].
- Rescue medication should not be overused, if you use more than 1-2 canisters of **albuterol** per month you need to talk to your doctor about a long-term control medication.

Long-term control medications: Use to prevent asthma attacks, not for immediate relief.

- “Inhaled steroids” need to be used daily. They act directly on your airways to reduce swelling and make breathing easier.
- “Long-acting bronchodilators” are prescribed when inhaled steroids alone are not able to control your symptoms. They relax and open airways but do not reduce swelling, so they need to be used with an inhaled steroid.

This table shows options for long-term control medications:

Preferred Inhaled Steroids: ~\$84 - 318*

Asmanex[®]
Azmacort[®]
Flovent[®]
Pulmicort[®]
Pulmicort Respules[®]
QVAR[®]
Alvesco[®]

Preferred Inhaled Bronchial Dilators: ~\$138 - 151*

Foradil[®]
Serevent Diskus[®]

Long-term Inhalers: ~\$187 - \$214*

Advair[®] - combination of **fluticasone** (Flovent[®]) and **salmeterol** (Serevent[®])

Symbicort[®] – combination of **budesonide** (Pulmicort[®]) and **formoterol** (Foradil[®])

*Approximate cost estimates based on a 30-day supply. Actual prices may vary depending on your pharmacy and the amount or strength of medication dispensed. Brand names in () are non-formulary and are listed for your reference only. Please see www.regenercex.com for the most up-to-date average medication cost.

Are there risks with long-acting bronchodilators?

Yes. One study found that long-acting bronchodilators actually increased the chance of death for some people with asthma. Talk to your doctor about this risk. This type of medication should ONLY be used when inhaled steroids alone do not control your asthma.

Are the chances of death greater for any specific ethnic groups using long-acting bronchodilators?

Yes. Over 28 weeks, Caucasians experienced one excess death for every 1250 people treated with long-acting bronchodilators. The risk is much higher for African Americans, who experience one excess death for every 370 people treated.

Are there other long-term control medications?

Other options include: Accolate[®], cromolyn (Intal[®]), Singulair[®], and theophylline (Theo-dur[®]). These options are not as effective as inhaled steroids and bronchial dilators for most people and should be considered second-choice options.

What about combination products like Advair[®] and Symbicort[®]?

- It is very important to only use Advair or Symbicort when your asthma is not controlled with inhaled steroids alone. Advair and Symbicort contain medications that may actually increase the chance of death for some people with asthma. Talk to your doctor about this risk.
- Advair and Symbicort combine “fixed” doses of inhaled steroids and bronchodilators in one inhaler. This can be convenient, however asthma symptoms change over time. If you need more or less medication, these combination inhalers can’t be adjusted easily, so a new prescription is needed.
- Many people use combination medications when one medication would work better. This can cause unnecessary medication use and increase the potential for more side effects.

Do I need training to use my medication inhaler properly?

Yes, it is very important to make sure that you use your inhaler correctly. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to see if you are using your inhaler correctly and to get additional training.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Uncontrolled asthma can cause serious damage to your lungs and airways. **If you have asthma, talk to your doctor to see whether a long-term control medication can decrease the frequency of your attacks.**

Note: Since many medication options are available, our physicians and pharmacists developed this to provide you with information about the available alternatives, as well as potential advantages and lack of advantages of the various products. This medication summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), scientific studies, and input from practicing doctors and specialists.



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