



# Nebulisers

A NEBULISER CREATES A MIST OF MEDICINE, WHICH IS THEN BREATHED IN THROUGH A MASK OR MOUTHPIECE.

## Nebulisers in brief

- A nebuliser is a machine that changes liquid medicine into a fine mist. This can then be inhaled through a mask or mouthpiece.
- Nebulisers are used to give high doses of reliever medicine usually in an emergency, for example when someone's having a severe asthma attack in an ambulance or in hospital.
- Most people with asthma don't need to use a nebuliser. The latest research shows using a reliever inhaler (usually blue) with a spacer is easier, cheaper and just as effective for treating mild to moderate asthma attacks. If a reliever inhaler doesn't help symptoms, call 999.
- In the past, some people with asthma used nebuliser machines at home but that's no longer advised for most people with asthma. Buying a nebuliser for home use could be unsafe and harmful and may not contain the licensed medicine dose for asthma.

## What is a nebuliser?

A nebuliser is a machine that changes liquid medicine into a fine mist. This can then be inhaled through a mask or mouthpiece. These days, nebulisers are used to give high doses of reliever medicine usually in an emergency, for example when someone's having a severe asthma attack in an ambulance or in hospital. This is because they can be the best way for a health professional to deliver a dose of medicine to someone who's really struggling to breathe.

In the past, some people with asthma used nebuliser machines at home but that's no longer advised for most people with asthma. This is because the latest research shows using a reliever inhaler with a spacer is easier, cheaper and just as effective for most people. Also, relying on a nebuliser to treat asthma symptoms at home can be dangerous because it could mean you wait longer before getting medical help when your asthma symptoms are getting worse.

## Who might get benefits from a nebuliser?

Most people with asthma don't need to use a nebuliser. In fact, the latest research has shown that using your [reliever inhaler](#) (usually blue) with a [spacer](#) is just as effective as a nebuliser for treating most mild to moderate asthma symptoms.

At the first signs of symptoms an [asthma attack](#), use your reliever inhaler. There's no evidence that using a nebuliser in this situation is any more effective.

## Can you get a nebuliser machine for home use?

Your GP or asthma nurse can't give you a nebuliser machine for use at home. You'll only be given one if your hospital consultant thinks it would be beneficial for you, after your asthma has been assessed by a specialist respiratory team and you have had your asthma diagnosis and medicines reviewed. They will consider a number of different individual factors before deciding whether or not to give you a nebuliser.

We recommend that you use a nebuliser machine at home only if your asthma consultant or respiratory specialist has given you one during your hospital visit. The nebuliser belongs to the hospital and annual maintenance checks and cleaning of the machine will be done there. If your asthma consultant decides you should have one at home, usually a respiratory physiotherapist will train you how to use the machine, how to look after it and how to make sure it's working properly.

## Can you buy or borrow a nebuliser machine?

The nebuliser machines you can buy in shops or online work differently to the hospital ones and may not be safe to use during an asthma attack. Ask your asthma consultant or call our Helpline on **0300 222 5800** (9am - 5pm; Mon - Fri) to find out more about the risks of using store-bought nebulisers. Also, the medicine used in nebuliser treatment (called nebules) can only be given to you on prescription by your GP or asthma consultant so there would be no point in buying the machine. Buying a nebuliser for home use could be unsafe and harmful and may not contain the licensed medicine dose for asthma.

You may have a friend or relative who has a nebuliser at home to treat another condition, such as cystic fibrosis (CF) - a genetic condition that causes the lungs to become clogged with mucus. Just because a nebuliser may help someone with CF to breathe more easily, it doesn't mean it's suitable for you. It's not recommended that you use a friend or relative's nebuliser to treat your asthma.

## Can you have a nebuliser machine if you think you need one?

First of all, ask yourself why you think you need a nebuliser for your asthma.

Is it because...

### ...YOU USED TO HAVE ONE OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW USED TO HAVE ONE?

While nebulisers were sometimes recommended for asthma in the past, the latest research shows using a reliever inhaler with a spacer is easier, cheaper and just as effective for treating mild to moderate asthma attacks

### ...YOU THINK USING A NEBULISER MACHINE IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN USING INHALERS?

Even though you may think that using a nebuliser is more effective than using an inhaler, the latest research shows using a reliever inhaler is just as effective for treating mild to moderate asthma symptoms. And for symptoms that get any worse, it's not recommended that you treat yourself at home but that you seek medical attention straight away.

### ...YOU'RE NOT SURE WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE AN ASTHMA ATTACK?

If you have [symptoms of an asthma attack](#), you should sit up straight and take one puff of your reliever inhaler every 30 to 60 seconds, up to 10 puffs. If you feel worse during this time, or don't feel better after 10 puffs, or you're worried for any reason - you need to call an ambulance. Don't be afraid of causing a fuss, even at night. If you go to A&E (Accident and Emergency) or are admitted to hospital, take your [written asthma action plan](#) with you if possible so hospital staff can see details of your asthma medicines. If you're still not sure what to do if you have symptoms of an asthma attack, speak to your GP or asthma nurse so you feel completely sure you know what to do if your symptoms get worse.

### ...YOU FEEL YOUR MEDICINES AREN'T WORKING AS YOU STILL GET ASTHMA SYMPTOMS REGULARLY?

It's likely you have symptoms because your asthma isn't well managed. The best way to manage your asthma is to take your preventer medicine every day, as directed. This helps to control the inflammation in your airways, lowering your risk of symptoms that can lead to an asthma attack. If you're finding it difficult to use your preventer inhaler as directed, talk to your GP, asthma nurse or pharmacist, who can help you get into a routine with your medicine.

If you're worried you're not getting all the benefits from your medicine, make an appointment with your GP or asthma nurse. They can make sure you're [using your inhaler properly](#), so you're getting the most from your medicine. They can also help with any other concerns you may have about your treatment.

**Remember:** if you have any questions about your inhalers, you can call our Helpline confidentially on **0300 222 5800** (9am - 5pm; Mon - Fri).

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Call the helpline on 0300 222 5800, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri.

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Speak to an asthma expert nurse on our helpline **0300 222 5800**  
Open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Visit our [contact page](#) for more ways of getting in touch.

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