

# Caring for Inhalers

## What are inhalers?

Inhalers are hand-held devices that let you breathe medicine directly into your lungs. There are 2 kinds of inhalers:

- A metered-dose inhaler (MDI) releases a mist of medicine when you press a button on the canister. Metered-dose inhalers contain a harmless gas that helps the medicine get into your lungs.
- A dry powder inhaler (DPI) releases powdered medicine when you put your lips on the inhaler and then quickly take a deep breath.

Proper care of your inhaler will help keep it working well. You need to keep medicine from building up and causing a blockage. Each brand of inhaler is different, so follow the instructions that come with your inhaler.

## How do I care for a metered dose inhaler?

Metered dose inhalers usually have 3 parts:

- A metal canister that contains the medicine
- A plastic cap that covers the end of the canister
- A spacer, which is a clear plastic bag or tube with a mask or mouthpiece on one end and a connector for the canister at the other end. It holds the medicine so that your child has more time to breathe in the medicine.

To care for your medicine canister, mouthpiece, and cap:

- Wipe the mouthpiece and cap with a clean cloth after each use to keep them clean.
- Once a day, or at least every few days, remove the cap and rinse the mouthpiece with warm running water for about 30 seconds. Shake it to remove excess water and allow it to air-dry overnight before you put the cap back on.
- Check the hole where the medicine comes out of the canister to make sure it's open and working. If it seems clogged, use a damp cotton swab to clean it.
- Keep the medicine canister dry and store it with the cap in place to help keep it clean. If it falls into water, like into a bathtub or swimming pool, it may not spray correctly. Throw it away and get another one.
- Store the inhaler at room temperature and keep it from getting too hot or too cold. Don't put it in the refrigerator or leave it in a hot car or out in the sun.
- If you keep the inhaler in a purse or travel bag, put it in a zippered case to help keep it clean.

If you are using a spacer, clean it once a week and anytime you have been sick.

- Take all parts of the spacer apart. Soak the pieces in warm soapy water for 5 to 10 minutes and shake them gently to get soapy water into all of the parts.

- Rinse the pieces well with clear water. Shake off any excess water and allow the pieces to air-dry between uses. Don't use a cloth or tissue to clean or dry the inside of the spacer. This can leave lint or fiber pieces that can cause static electricity inside the spacer. This can decrease the amount of medicine that gets to your lungs.
- Don't put the spacer in the dishwasher to clean it.

## **How do I care for a dry powder inhaler?**

Each brand of DPI is different, so follow the instructions that come with your inhaler. Some general guidelines for care include:

- Don't wash a dry powder inhaler. Keep it dry at all times. Don't store it in a damp place like the bathroom. If it falls into water, like into a bathtub or swimming pool, it may not spray correctly. Throw it away and get another one.
- If you get saliva on the mouthpiece, wipe it with a dry clean cloth. If the inhaler has a cap, keep the cap on the inhaler when it's not in use to keep it clean.
- Store the inhaler at room temperature and keep it from getting too hot or too cold. Don't put it in the refrigerator or leave it in a hot car or out in the sun.
- If you keep the inhaler in a purse or travel bag, put it in a zippered case to help keep it clean.

Check the instructions that come with your inhaler or talk with your pharmacist or healthcare provider if you have any questions.

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