

Bronchodilator: Anticholinergic

What is this medicine used for?

Anticholinergic bronchodilators are medicines used to treat breathing problems caused by asthma, chronic bronchitis, or emphysema. (Chronic bronchitis and emphysema are also called chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD.) This medicine is called a controller medicine because when it's taken regularly every day, it helps to control symptoms.

Anticholinergic medicine used alone does not treat sudden, severe breathing problems. It does not give quick relief of wheezing in acute attacks. For acute attacks, you need a different type of medicine called a reliever.

Sometimes this medicine is combined with other types of breathing medicine to treat sudden symptoms. It is also used when you cannot take other types of medicine to help your breathing.

If you have asthma or COPD, you may have symptoms like coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Your symptoms are caused by 2 different problems in the airways.

- One problem is that the muscles in the airways tighten up, which causes the feeling of chest tightness and wheezing.
- The other problem is swelling, irritation, and too much mucus in the airways.

If you have asthma, your symptoms often start after you are exposed to a trigger. Asthma triggers can include pollen, animals, mold, colds, exercise, cold air, and air pollutants. It's important to know what triggers your symptoms so that you can avoid those things or take your reliever medicine before being around a trigger.

Asthma symptoms come and go throughout the day or week and get better with medicine. If you have COPD, your symptoms usually get worse over time and never go away completely.

How does it work?

Anticholinergic medicine helps breathing problems because it blocks one of the chemicals in your body that make your airway muscles tight. When the airway muscles are more relaxed and less tight, you will have fewer symptoms and be able to breathe better. Anticholinergic medicine also lowers the amount of mucus made in the airways.

The medicine can be taken in different ways. For example:

- A hand-held device, such as a metered-dose inhaler (MDI) or a dry powder inhaler, is small and easy to carry with you. Inhalers help send the medicine directly to your lungs as you take a deep breath. Some MDI medicines may need a spacer. A spacer is a small tube or bag that holds the medicine while you breathe it into your lungs.

- A nebulizer is a machine that you can use at home. Medicine is mixed with liquid and the machine forms a mist. You breathe in the mist to help get the medicine into your lungs.

What else do I need to know about this medicine?

- Follow the directions that come with your medicine, including information about food or alcohol. Make sure you know how and when to take your medicine. Do not take more or less than you are supposed to take.
- Try to get all of your prescriptions filled at the same place. Your pharmacist can help make sure that all of your medicines are safe to take together.
- Keep a list of your medicines with you. List all of the prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins that you take. Tell all healthcare providers who treat you about all of the products you are taking.
- Many medicines have side effects. A side effect is a symptom or problem that is caused by the medicine. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist what side effects the medicine may cause and what you should do if you have side effects.

If you have any questions, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for more information. Be sure to keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

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