



# Asthma Medications

There are basic groups of medications used in the treatment of asthma:

Generic names are listed before trade names.



**MEDICAL  
HANDOUT**

<b>Adrenergic Drugs</b>	<b>Corticosteroids</b>	<b>Theophyllines</b>	<b>Misc.</b>
Metaproterenol	Beclomethasone	Theo24	Cromolyn
Alupent, Metaprel	Beclovent, Vanceril	TheoDur	Intal
Albuterol/Salbutamol	Flunisolide	SloPhyllin	Nedocromil
Ventolin, Proventil	AeroBid	Constant-T	Tilade
Terbutaline	Triamcinalone	Quibron-T	
Brethine, Bricanyl	Azmacort	Aminophylline	Ipratropium
Bitolterol		Choledyl	Atrovent
Tornalate	Prednisone	Uniphyll	
Ephedrine	Medrol	Theolair SR	
Epinepherine		Duraphyl	
Adrenaline, Primatine		LoBid	
Pirbuterol		Lodrane	
Maxair		Respbid	
Salmeterol		Sustaire	
Serevent			

## Drug Delivery

Many of the adrenergic and steroids medicines are available in tablet and inhaler form. Inhaler medicines go directly to the lungs. Tablets travel through the blood stream before reaching the lungs. Tablets have more side effects because they go throughout the body. Side effects are reduced by using the inhaler form of these medicines as much as possible.

If your breathing problems are more severe, and you are “tight”, and unable to take a good breath, it may be that the inhaler medicines do not work well, because they cannot reach the deep parts of your lungs. At such a time, tablet forms of these medicines are often used.

## Speed

The adrenergic medicines work the quickest to relieve spasm and constriction of the breathing passages. The steroid medicines are amongst the slowest of asthma medicines in their effect.

## Combinations

If you need both the steroid and the beta-adrenergic stimulator inhalers, use the beta-adrenergic first.

This allows the breathing passages to open more, and then the steroid inhaler medicine will go further into the lung and work more effectively.

## Inhaler Use

If you have an inhaler, it is important to check that you are using it correctly. Most patients need one-to-one instruction to make sure of proper use. Inhaler “chambers” may make it easier to use your inhaler, or to have the medicine go to your lungs and not deposit on the back of your throat.

## Side Effects

All medicines sometimes have side effects.

Adrenergics can cause anxiety, tremor, nervousness, or palpitations.

Theophyllines can cause nausea or upset stomach. These effects are minimized by controlling the dosage.

Corticosteroid tablets have some immediate side effects including weight gain. Oral steroids also have some serious long term side effects: These side effects include diabetes, weakening of bones, and a rounded face.

*Continued*



Copyright Arnie Baker, MD, 1989-2003. Revised 11/24/2003. This training handout may be photocopied for distribution only if used in its entirety, and only with written permission. Electronic transmission is expressly prohibited. Copyright notice and permission must accompany use.

Distribution after December 2004 is unlicensed and prohibited. Please report unlicensed use.

<http://arniebakercycling.com/>

Sometimes it is necessary to use steroids for a long time to help breathing. The side effects are sometimes a necessary problem to be coped with, in order to breathe. The long term side effects of oral steroid tablets should be minimized by using, as much as possible, inhaled steroids and the correct doses of the theophylline and adrenergic medicines.

### **Preferred Medications**

If you need something for asthma only once in a while, it makes sense to use the adrenergic inhaler, as needed, up to 2 puffs 4 times a day. It is the fastest working of asthma medicines, and you use it only when you need it.

If you always need some medicine to help your asthma, then it makes sense to take a corticosteroid inhaler regularly. You can add the adrenergic inhaler when and if you need it. For those needing long-acting beta-adrenergics, the relatively new inhaled salmetrol is the only one currently available.

Cromolyns may help a minority of patients. They often require consistent long-term use to be effective. They seem to be more successful in children than in adults. They are marketed for exercise-induced bronchospasm, but I have not found them very useful for that indication.

Atrovent may help a minority of patients with asthma, usually those who also have with smoking-related chronic bronchitis.

**AB**