

## Spacers

Spacers are used to help deliver medication from standard metered dose inhalers (puffers) to the lungs as they remove the need to coordinate pressing the inhaler and breathing at the same time.

## Process

1. Assemble the spacer
2. Remove the cap
3. Shake the inhaler and place into the end of the spacer
4. Advise the person to breathe out gently and seal the lips around the spacer
5. Press the inhaler and advise the person to take a deep breath in and then hold their breath for as long as comfortable (or take 3-4 breaths in and out from the spacer)
6. Replace the cap on the inhaler and store as recommended by the manufacturer

## Risks/Considerations

- ⚠ Plastic spacers should be washed in warm soapy water, rinsed and should be allowed to air dry before first use, about once a month thereafter and after recovery from a respiratory infection. They should NOT be dried with a towel.
- ⚠ Replace plastic spacers about every 12 months if used every day. If it breaks or cracks, get a new one straight away. Most cardboard spacers are suitable for use for up to 7 days and then should be thrown away.

## Spacer use and care



### What is a spacer?

A spacer is a holding chamber usually made of plastic and shaped like a football or tube. It makes it easier to take asthma or COPD medication from the type of puffer called an MDI (metered dose inhaler).

Spacers help the medication get straight to where it's needed in your lungs, with less medication ending up in your mouth and throat where it can lead to irritation or mild infections. A spacer can also make it easier to coordinate breathing in and pressing your puffer.

#### Spacers should be used by:

- all children – kids aged under 4–5 years will need a mask attached
- all adults taking a corticosteroid preventer medication (e.g. Floxotide, Symbicort) using an MDI/puffer
- adults who have trouble coordinating the 'press and breathe' technique when using an MDI/puffer
- anyone taking a reliever medication (e.g. Ventolin) during an asthma attack.

### Why not use a nebuliser?

All the latest research shows that a puffer with spacer works just as well as a nebuliser for treating asthma symptoms, including during an asthma attack. A puffer with spacer is also simpler, cheaper and handier, is much more portable, and has fewer side-effects.

### Choosing a spacer

There are many different brands and sizes of spacers available. Ask your pharmacist, nurse or asthma educator about which spacer might be best for you or your child. Look for one that you can put together easily and that will be convenient for everyday use.

### Tips for using your spacer

- Fire only one puff into your spacer at a time
- Breathe in from your spacer as soon as you've fired a puff into it – the medication settles on the bottom very quickly

- For each puff, you can either:
  - ⇒ take one big breath in - breathe in slowly, deeply and fully and hold breath for about 5 seconds (recommended) OR
  - ⇒ breathe in and out normally for 4 breaths (tidal breathing) if you are unable to take 1 big breath in.

#### Remember to shake your puffer before firing each puff.

Check you have the steps right by watching a short video showing how to use a puffer and spacer correctly in our [How-to video library](#).

### Cleaning your spacer

Clean your spacer about once a month and after you have recovered from any cold or respiratory infection. Your spacer may become a bit cloudy over time, but it shouldn't be mouldy or brown.

#### To clean your spacer:

- Dismantle your spacer, if necessary
- Wash all the parts in clean warm water with liquid dishwashing detergent
- Allow the parts to air dry without rinsing – drying with a cloth or paper towel can result in static building up on the inside of the spacer, which makes the medication stick to the sides
- Wipe the mouthpiece clean of detergent, if needed
- When completely dry, reassemble if necessary

New plastic spacers (e.g. *Able Spacer Universal*, *Breath-A-Tech*, *Volumatic*) also need to be washed before you use them for the first time. If a new spacer has to be used immediately, you can 'prime' the spacer by firing multiple (at least 10) puffs into it to begin with to help reduce the static build-up inside. You can then take your medication dose as usual.

Spacers made from antistatic polymers (e.g. *Able A2A*, *AeroChamber Plus*, *Breathe Easy*, *La Petite E-Chamber*, *La Grande E-Chamber*, *OptiChamber Diamond*) do not need to be primed or washed before first use, nor do disposable cardboard spacers.

Your spacer should be checked by your pharmacist, nurse or asthma educator every 6–12 months to check the structure is intact (e.g. no cracks) and the valve is working properly.

To watch a video on spacer use, click here: [nationalasthma.org.au/living-with-asthma/how-to-videos](http://nationalasthma.org.au/living-with-asthma/how-to-videos)

Disclaimer: It is important to note that information contained in this brochure is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.



[nationalasthma.org.au](http://nationalasthma.org.au)   [asthmahandbook.org.au](http://asthmahandbook.org.au)

Figure 1 - National Asthma Council Spacer Use and Care