

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Nebulisers – what you need to know

This leaflet provides information about the use and maintenance of nebuliser compressors.

It is not intended to replace talking with medical or nursing staff.

What is a nebuliser?

A nebuliser is a device which converts a medicine solution into a continuous fine aerosol mist which can be inhaled directly into your lungs via a mask or a mouthpiece.



Why are nebulisers used?

A nebuliser is used to give a large dose of a medicine simply and effectively:

- It administers a medicine to a patient who is too ill or too breathless to use an inhaler.
- It administers to the lungs medicines which are not available in inhalers.

Who needs a nebuliser?

- Someone who needs emergency treatment for asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

- Someone who needs long term treatment for COPD.
- Some asthmatics for ongoing treatment.
- Patients who have cystic fibrosis, bronchiectasis or antibiotic treatment for HIV.
- Some people who have lung cancer use nebulised medication to relieve symptoms.

Does everyone with breathing problems need to use a nebuliser?

No. Most asthmatics and people with COPD can be well-controlled using inhalers. Research shows inhalers are as good as nebulisers and more convenient, particularly a metered dose inhaler and spacer device.

How often is it necessary to use a nebuliser?

If the medical condition is stable, a nebuliser can be used up to four times daily. In some circumstances it can be used more frequently following consultation with a doctor or nurse.

Does the compressor need to be replaced?

No, unless it breaks down, but it will need servicing annually. If you bought the nebuliser, you will need to take out a service contract with the manufacturer.

Why is it important to have the compressor serviced regularly?

Your compressor needs to run at a fixed rate of six litres of air per minute to produce the right size droplets required to reach the base of your lungs. Larger droplets will stay in the back of the throat and very small droplets are breathed out. The compressor also has filters, which need changing.

How often do the nebuliser and masks/mouth pieces need replacing?

A nebuliser unit is designed to be used by only you and should be changed every three months (blue). Some nebulisers are more durable and last up to one year (pale blue).

How often should a nebuliser be cleaned?

At home, nebulisers and masks/mouth pieces should be washed in warm soapy water after each use or at least once a day. They should be rinsed and dried. Ten seconds of air must be blown through the system before further use. The tubing should be kept dry. A moist environment will encourage the growth of bacteria which can cause chest infections.

How do you know if you need a nebuliser?

If you have a hospital consultant then he/she will discuss your requirements with you, or your GP might suggest it. Ideally you should have a trial period to see if it gives you any benefit. Recent research has shown a metered dose inhaler and a spacer device can be as effective as a nebuliser with none of the inconvenience.

How long does it take to nebulise medication?

For normal use it should take no longer than ten minutes. Thicker medication, such as antibiotics, may take longer.

Does all the liquid in the nebuliser get used up?

There is usually a small amount left in the chamber at the end of use. You should use the nebuliser until it starts to splutter. Then tap the chamber and continue for another minute.

Is a mask or mouthpiece better?

Bronchodilator response is the same for both. A mask should be tight fitting and you need to breathe through your mouth and wash your face following nebulisation. If using Ipratropium Bromide (Atrovent) or steroids, a mouthpiece should be used as there is a possibility of the nebulised medication causing glaucoma or cataracts.

Is there a special way to breathe?

No, just breathe in and out normally.

Your nebulised medication is:

- 1.dose
.....frequency
- 2.dose
.....frequency
- 3.dose
.....frequency

4.dose
.....frequency

Do not fill the nebuliser until you are ready to use it.

Nebuliser problems

If your nebuliser takes much longer than normal (for example longer than ten minutes to run or it bubbles with no mist) repeat the cleaning process. Make sure you have the ‘mushroom’ or T piece that sits in the cup where the medicine goes. Without this piece in place, the nebuliser will be unable to work. If it still does not work, replace the nebuliser chamber. If your compressor breaks down, you should use your inhaler and spacer device until you can get help.

In case of breakdown, contact:

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If there is a power cut or the nebuliser has broken, until repair use your short-acting reliever; four puffs through a spacer device.

Contact details

If you require any help, advice or support please contact:

Respiratory Specialist Nurse
Cardiorespiratory Department (Clinic 4)
King’s Treatment Centre
King’s Mill Hospital

Telephone: 01623 622515, extension 6831, 3541 and 6324, Monday – Friday, 9am–5pm

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King’s Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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