Let's Talk About...

MDIs with a spacer

This handout will explain an MDI with spacer, how to use it with a mouthpiece or a mask, and how to clean the MDI with spacer.

What is an MDI with a spacer?

An **MDI** (metered dose inhaler) is a way for your child to receive a precise amount of medicine sprayed into the lungs. Some inhalers have a pressurized canister that sprays out medicine when you press down on it.

A **spacer** is a special tube that attaches to the inhaler. The spacer helps the medicine get all the way to your lungs where it is needed most. You can use a spacer with a mouthpiece (this is best for most patients) or mask (best for young children or others who have difficulty using the mouthpiece).

How do I use the MDI with a spacer and mouthpiece?

1. Remove the cap from the inhaler and the cap from the spacer.
2. Prime the inhaler if it is new or it has not been used for 48 hours. You prime it by shaking the inhaler to mix the medicine and then squirting a puff into the air. Check the package in case your inhaler has specific priming instructions.
3. Insert the inhaler into the rubber end of the spacer.
4. Shake the inhaler well just before each puff so the medicine is mixed.
5. Breathe out.
6. Hold the inhaler upright. Place the mouthpiece in your mouth between your teeth, and close your lips around the mouthpiece.
7. Press the canister down to release a puff of medicine.
8. Breathe in deeply and slowly through your mouth for three to five seconds.
9. Hold your breath for 10 seconds.
10. Remove the spacer from your mouth and breathe out slowly.
11. Wait one minute between puffs if your doctor ordered more than one puff.

Note: If you're using an inhaler with a steroid medicine, rinse your mouth with water after each use.

How do I use the MDI with a spacer and mask?

1. Remove the cap from the inhaler, and the cap from the spacer.
2. Prime the inhaler if it is new or it has not been used for 48 hours. You prime it by shaking the inhaler to mix the medicine and then squirting a puff into the air. Check the package in case your inhaler has specific priming instructions.
3. Insert the inhaler into the rubber end of the spacer.
4. Shake the inhaler well just before each puff so the medicine is mixed.
5. If possible, have your child breathe out.
6. Hold the inhaler upright. Place the mask over your child's mouth and nose. Make sure there is a good seal between the mask and face.
7. Press the canister down to release a puff of medicine.
8. Encourage your child to breathe in deeply and slowly for three to five seconds, if possible.
9. Keep a good seal between the face and mask for 6 breaths, and then remove the mask from your child's face.

10 Wait one minute between puffs if your doctor ordered more than one puff.

Note: If you're using an inhaler with a steroid, rinse your mouth with water after each use.

How can I help prepare my child?

Invite you child to explore the spacer and practice holding their breath or pretend giving the medicine to a doll or parent. Practice having the mask over your child's face.

For mask treatments, if appropriate, encourage your child to hold the mask during his treatment. If your child has trouble holding still while using the mask, give your child a small incentive or distraction. If these tips do not work, you may need to gently hold your child while he receives the treatment.

When should I clean my MDI and spacer?

Clean the MDI and spacer at least once a week to help keep medicine from building up on them.

How do I clean my MDI?

1. Remove the metal canister.
2. Rinse the plastic case and cap in warm, running water. Make sure you clear medicine build-up from the spray nozzle.
3. Thoroughly dry the plastic case and cap.
4. Gently replace the canister in the case with a twisting motion.
5. Put the cap back on the mouthpiece.

How do I clean my spacer?

1. Remove the rubber end piece where the MDI fits.
2. Wash the spacer in warm water and mild detergent (dishwashing liquid works well).
3. After washing, let the spacer air dry. Do not wipe it dry.

© 2013 Intermountain Healthcare, Primary Children's Medical Center. All of the information contained in the ***Let's Talk About . . .*** series is for educational purposes only. This educational information is not a substitute for medical advice or for care from a physician or other health care professional. If you have questions about your child's health, contact your health care provider.

Pediatric Education Services, 801.662.3500 | Rev. 07/13, LTA522875674