

Patients: Accessing Nebulizers and Nebulized Medications



This resource is designed to help **people living with COPD** navigate the process of getting and using nebulizers. It was created by the COPD Foundation Nebulizer Consortium, group of health care providers, industry partners, and patient advocates. (September 2025)

NEBULIZER AND MEDICATION PRESCRIPTIONS

Nebulizers are medical devices that turn liquid medication into a mist that you can inhale. The nebulizer and medications require a prescription from your healthcare provider (HCP).

You Can Buy a Nebulizer

If you decide to buy a nebulizer on your own, be sure to choose one that works with your medication. Look over the medication's prescribing information to find the recommended nebulizer type. Using the correct nebulizer helps make sure that the right amount of medication reaches your lungs. Check with your pharmacist or HCP if you're not sure.

Medication

Nebulized medications fall into two basic classes: bronchodilators and anti-inflammatory medicines. Bronchodilators can work quickly (short-acting) or take longer to work (long-acting). Short-acting medications are mostly used for rescue, when you are short of breath. Long-acting meds are usually used every day to make COPD symptoms less severe.

Anti-inflammatories are also usually used daily. These include inhaled corticosteroids and phosphodiesterase inhibitors. Talk to your HCP to see if newer options may be right for you.

Nebulizer Types

Different types of nebulizers include standard jet, efficient jet (breath-enhanced, breath-actuated models), and vibrating mesh nebulizers. Efficiency of devices vary significantly. Unless your HCP requests a specific nebulizer, home care or durable medical equipment (DME) companies typically supply a generic type, but those can be less efficient. If you need a stronger nebulizer to adhere to your medication treatment plan, talk to your HCP about choosing a more efficient nebulizer type. This is especially important for inhaled antibiotics.

HOW TO USE YOUR NEBULIZER

Scan the QR code to learn more about using the different nebulizer types.



**Breath-actuated
Jet Nebulizer**



**Breath-enhanced
Jet Nebulizer**



**Standard
Jet Nebulizer**



**Continuous Vibrating
Mesh Nebulizer**



QUESTIONS:

Is it safe to combine medications with a nebulizer?

Many medications cannot be mixed in nebulizer cups. Ask your pharmacists or HCP if your nebulizer medications can be combined first. Signs that medications aren't compatible are cloudiness when mixing with another medication, clumping, or unusual residue. If you see this, stop and talk to your pharmacist or HCP before using them again.

What is the recommended volume of solution for nebulizer use?

The amount of liquid used in a nebulizer should be enough for the medication to be efficiently delivered (usually 2-3 milliliters) but should not last longer than 15 minutes.

How do you know when to end a nebulizer treatment?

Gently tap the side of the nebulizer to help the medicine settle so it can turn into mist. Use until the mist gets uneven or sputters. This means most of the medicine is done.



NAVIGATING HEALTH INSURANCE AND MEDICARE

With Medicare, nebulizers and their medications are usually covered under Medicare Part B, not Part D (prescriptions). Make sure your pharmacy or supplier bills your prescriptions correctly. Check if your nebulizer is covered to avoid surprises. The same is true with private insurance plans. Consult your insurance provider to understand coverage and limitations.

WHERE TO GET A NEBULIZER

Your HCP can order a nebulizer for you from a local pharmacy, a durable medical equipment (DME) company, or a specialty pharmacy.

Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Companies

Many get their nebulizer equipment and medications from a home care or DME company. Your HCP can work with a DME to find the right nebulizer for you. They accept Medicare or private insurance, but keep in mind that not all carry every type of nebulizer.

Specialty Pharmacy: What is a specialty pharmacy?

In some cases, a specialty pharmacy may be needed to provide your medications for specific health conditions. If you need a particular nebulizer or medicine, ask your doctor to write "dispense as written" on your prescription to avoid getting a different type. Some pharmacies help patients with insurance and paperwork and may offer and apply coupons.

When would I need a specialty pharmacy?

Some medications are not always sold at local drugstores like Publix, Kroger, CVS, or Rite Aid because they are paid for through Medicare Part B, which needs special approval. Some medications are only sold at these specially approved pharmacies. Your HCP will tell you if you need to use a specialty pharmacy like: Accredo, Direct Rx, or CVS Specialty.

CLEANING, DISINFECTING, AND REPLACING YOUR NEBULIZER / RESOURCES

Nebulizers require different care instructions. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting to keep them working properly. People with certain respiratory conditions, like bronchiectasis or cystic fibrosis, may need to clean and disinfect their nebulizer more often. Your HCP can help decide if you need special instructions like needing to use distilled over sterile water for rinses.

Replace supplies regularly, usually every 6 months for reusable types and every 7-10 days for disposables, or after a respiratory infection. Talk with your HCP about getting refills or replacements ahead of time. Having backup supplies also come in handy.

RESOURCES:

Using your
nebulizer
videos:



How
nebulizers
work:



copdf.co/
Nebulization-101
Nebulization Guide



My DME is (name/phone): _____

My pharmacy is (name/phone): _____