

## Spacer use and care



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, plus less medication ends 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. *Seretide*, *Flixotide*) 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 breathe in and out of the spacer several times or take one very big breath from the spacer

### ***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 on our website: [www.nationalasthma.org.au](http://www.nationalasthma.org.au)

### Cleaning your spacer

Clean your spacer before you use it for the first time and then about once a month. Your spacer may become a bit cloudy over time, but it shouldn't be mouldy or brown.

To clean your spacer:

- Dismantle your spacer
- Wash all the parts in clean warm water with kitchen 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 ready for use

If you can't wash your new spacer before using it for the first time, you may need to 'prime' the spacer by firing 2–4 puffs into it to begin with. This ensures there is no static build-up inside. You can then take your medication dose as usual.

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.