How to use your nebuliser

Information for you

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This leaflet explains how to use your nebuliser. However, you should speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have any questions.

A nebuliser is a small chamber into which liquid medicine is put. Air is blown through it to make a mist, which you then breathe in.

The air is blown through the nebuliser chamber by an air compressor. Sometimes oxygen is used instead of air. However, this would normally only be done in hospital or in an emergency by ambulance staff.

Nebulisers are able to deliver a larger amount of medication than you would normally receive from an inhaler. They can be useful if you are unable to use inhalers for any reason or for when the medication is not available in an inhaler.

The high doses of medication that are given by the nebuliser can sometimes cause side-effects, depending on the medication. Common side effects include tremor of the hands, palpitations and muscle cramps. But you should refer to the individual drug information leaflet for potential side effects from your specific medication.
How to use the nebuliser

1. Connect the tubing to the nebuliser chamber and attach the other end to the compressor unit.

2. Place the prescribed medication into the nebuliser chamber. Some medication can be mixed together at the same time, such as salbutamol and ipratropium. Speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice.

3. Attach the mouthpiece or mask to the nebuliser chamber.

4. Make sure you are sitting comfortably in an upright position.

5. If you are using a mouthpiece, seal your lips around it and breathe through your mouth. If you are using a mask, place it over your mouth and nose and breathe through your mouth.

6. Switch the compressor on. Mist should start coming from the mouthpiece or mask. Breathe normally. Make sure you keep the nebuliser chamber upright when you are using it.

7. When mist is no longer coming from the mouthpiece or mask, the treatment is finished. This usually takes five to ten minutes. A small amount of liquid may be left at the bottom of the chamber. This is quite normal.
8. Wash the nebuliser chamber after every use to prevent bacteria growing, as this could lead to a chest infection. Disconnect the tubing from the chamber and wash the chamber and mask or mouthpiece in warm soapy water. Rinse well and leave to drip dry.

9. Once a week you should disconnect the compressor unit from the mains and wipe over the unit and tubing with a clean damp cloth.

Replacement parts and servicing

Your respiratory nurse specialist will let you know how often your individual equipment will need to be replaced or serviced, and will advise you about the supply of chambers, tubing and masks.

Make sure you thoroughly clean your compressor before you return it to the hospital for servicing or replacement.

To avoid any dust or fibres entering the machinery, do not keep the compressor on the floor.

Make sure you let your respiratory nurse specialist know if your address or telephone number changes.
What to do if the nebuliser system does not work properly

Here are some of the most common problems that can happen, and some possible solutions.

• **The nebuliser is not making any mist.**
  Check the tubing is connected properly.
  Make sure all the parts of the chamber are assembled properly.
  Clean the nebuliser chamber.
  If these don’t work, try replacing the whole nebuliser chamber and tubing with a new one.

• **The nebuliser is leaking.**
  Hold the nebuliser upright and check all the connections are well fitted.
  If this doesn’t work, try replacing the whole nebuliser chamber and tubing with a new one.

• **The nebuliser is taking longer than usual.**
  Clean the nebuliser chamber or replace it with a new one.
• **The compressor does not run.**

   Make sure it is plugged in and that all the switches are on.

   You may need to replace the fuse in the plug.

   Contact the respiratory nurse specialist for advice.

• **The compressor breaks down.**

   Contact the telephone number on the label attached to the compressor. This is usually the respiratory nurse or the respiratory ward. They will give you advice about getting a replacement compressor.

   Don’t panic. Remember most nebulisers are for giving you higher doses of medication than you would get from an inhaler.

   In an emergency, you can use an inhaler as a ‘temporary nebuliser’ to tide you overnight or over a weekend. Ask your respiratory nurse for more details.
• You are not getting any relief from the nebuliser.

If you are having more difficulty breathing and not getting the usual relief from your nebuliser, contact your family doctor (GP) for advice. In the evenings or at the weekend, you should call NHS24 on 0845 4 24 24 24.

Further information

For any further information regarding the supply and use of nebuliser equipment, speak to your respiratory nurse specialist.
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