

## Nebulisers & Asthma

### This factfile covers;

- What is a nebuliser?
- Who needs to use a nebuliser?
- Using a nebuliser
- What types of nebuliser are available?
- Buying a nebuliser
- Manufacturers and suppliers
- Financial assistance for buying a nebuliser

For most people with asthma, a standard metered dose inhaler and spacer is just as effective as a nebuliser.

### What is a nebuliser?

A 'nebuliser' is actually the small plastic container that is filled with a medicine solution. A compressor (usually electric) is used to blow air or oxygen through this solution to make a fine mist of medicine. This mist is breathed into the lungs through a mouthpiece or mask.

### Who needs to use a nebuliser?

Nebulisers are most commonly used to treat severe attacks of asthma at a doctor's surgery or in an accident and emergency department. In fact, research has shown that in most cases, multiple doses of reliever medicine through a spacer are at least as good as a nebuliser at treating most asthma attacks in children and adults.

Most people with asthma will not need to use a nebuliser at home. Their inhaled medicine is best delivered by an inhaler or by an inhaler with a spacer. Inhalers and spacers are also more portable and cost-effective for use at home.

However, sometimes people who have severe asthma symptoms or other lung diseases find that normal reliever inhalers do not work for them. To help to open up the airways or deal with an attack that comes on very quickly, a doctor may prescribe nebulised reliever medicine to use at home. A very small number of people with asthma also need to use a nebuliser to take their regular preventer-type medicine. Nebulisers are medical equipment and to make sure they are used safely, they need to be used under the supervision of your doctor, respiratory specialist nurse or hospital consultant.

### Using a nebuliser

Get your hospital consultant, doctor or asthma nurse to show you how your nebuliser works. You also need a set of written instructions on how to use your nebuliser. These should include:

- how to set up the nebuliser
- how to keep it clean
- how to get it serviced
- how to get it repaired
- how much medicine to use
- how to put the medicine in the nebuliser
- when to take it and how long you should take it for
- how to understand the warning signals that show your asthma is getting worse, even with treatment
- what to do in an emergency.

You should also attend an asthma clinic regularly to review your treatment.

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### What types of nebuliser are available?

Hand- or foot-operated nebulisers need a person to pump them. Most people with asthma would find them unsuitable. They are also difficult to manage if you are trying to use one with a small, restless child. Another person needs to be available at any time the person with asthma might need the nebuliser.

There are a number of different types of electric nebulisers available:

- Mains 240V only – these plug into a UK mains socket.
- Car battery – these can be plugged in, usually into the car cigarette lighter, for use when travelling.
- Any mains voltage, or mains 110/220V – other countries may have a different mains voltage to the UK so these can be helpful if you travel. Check with your travel agent about voltage in different countries.
- Rechargeable battery – these contain a power supply of their own and so can be used anywhere. They need to be recharged from the mains regularly.

### Buying a nebuliser?

Even if a doctor recommends using a nebuliser, they cannot prescribe one on the NHS. If hospital consultants decide that a nebuliser is necessary, they can apply for NHS funding to provide one, but they may not always get the funding. This means that some people have to buy their own nebuliser.

If you do have to buy one, most manufacturers sell them by mail order. They can also tell you if they have a local agent who will supply them. Your pharmacist may also be able to order one for you, but they may only offer one model.

Talk to your doctor or hospital consultant before buying a nebuliser. If your doctor is uncertain about particular brands they can obtain advice from a chest clinic. The doctor or hospital consultant will need to know that the nebuliser you choose is suitable for the medicine they prescribe.

It is important that you have your nebuliser serviced regularly, so you need to look into this before you buy. Some local hospitals will do this for you even though your nebuliser is not an NHS one. Speak to your doctor or asthma nurse. Otherwise you should speak to the nebuliser manufacturer about servicing arrangements.



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### Buying a nebuliser? (continued)

You should also consider the following:

- Does the price quoted include everything that is needed? Some may charge extra for postage and packing, or for parts such as mouthpieces or masks.
- Nebulisers are not exempt from VAT. However, if you are an individual who has been recommended to buy a nebuliser by your doctor, you qualify for VAT exemption. Check with the manufacturer how you can claim VAT at zero rate for your nebuliser. You may need to fill out a form from the manufacturer or obtain a letter from your doctor. Pharmacies and GP surgeries that order nebulisers are not usually exempt from VAT.
- Make sure you are clear about how often the compressor needs servicing and how often the filters, tubing and other parts need changing.
- How heavy is the nebuliser, what are the running costs, how big is it and how long is the warranty for?

### Manufacturers and suppliers

Inclusion in this factfile does not imply that Asthma UK recommends these manufacturers or models.

For most people with asthma, a standard metered dose inhaler and spacer is just as effective as a nebuliser. If your doctor thinks that nebulised medicine is a necessary part of your asthma treatment and you do have to buy your own compressor and nebuliser, this list of some of the major manufacturers and suppliers may be helpful. Inclusion in this factfile does not imply that Asthma UK recommends these manufacturers or models. It is really important to have the support of your local services, as they can provide the best advice on what to choose, in accordance with your local chest clinic. This means that they will be more likely to be able to help you, should you need advice, parts or servicing for your machine.

We are happy to amend this list if you notice any omissions or errors.

#### **AFP Medical Ltd**

71 Somers Road  
Rugby, Warks CV22 7DG  
Freephone 0800 328 2306  
[www.afpmedical.com](http://www.afpmedical.com)

#### **Cameron-Price**

Charlotte Road  
Stirchley, Birmingham B30 2BT  
0121 459 2121; [asthmarelief.co.uk](http://asthmarelief.co.uk)

#### **Clement Clarke International**

Edinburgh Way  
Harlow, Essex CM20 2TT.  
01279 414969; [clement-clarke.com](http://clement-clarke.com)

#### **Omron Healthcare UK Ltd**

Opal Drive  
Milton Keynes MK15 0DG  
08707 502771  
[www.omron.co.uk](http://www.omron.co.uk)



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### Manufacturers and suppliers (continued)

#### **Pari Medical Ltd**

Enterprise House, Station Approach  
West Byfleet, Surrey KT14 6NE  
01932 341122  
[www.pari.de/english](http://www.pari.de/english)

#### **Schill Medical**

2 Garnett Drive, Bricket Wood, St Albans,  
Hertfordshire AL2 3QN  
01923 676499  
[derekb@schillmedical.com](mailto:derekb@schillmedical.com)  
[www.schillmedical.com](http://www.schillmedical.com)

#### **Profile Respiratory Systems Ltd**

Heath Place, Bognor Regis  
West Sussex PO22 9SL  
0870 7703434  
[www.profilehs.com](http://www.profilehs.com)

#### **Sunrise Medical Ltd**

Sunrise Business Park  
High Street, Wollaston  
West Midlands DY8 4PS  
01384 446688  
[www.sunrisemedical.co.uk](http://www.sunrisemedical.co.uk)

### Financial assistance for buying a nebuliser

Many people contact Asthma UK asking for financial assistance to help to buy medical equipment such as nebulisers. Unfortunately the charity does not have a welfare fund and so is unable to give money to individuals.

Doctors cannot prescribe electric nebulisers on the NHS but they can prescribe the drugs to put in a nebuliser.

Hospital consultants can apply for NHS funding to obtain nebulisers to loan out to individuals, if they feel that this equipment is essential for that person's treatment. Unfortunately, whether money is available for this depends on local funding priorities. Some hospitals offer a nebuliser loan service. You may be able to obtain help in borrowing or buying nebulisers in a more affordable way from:

#### **Breathing New Life**

National Association for the Relief of Apnoea  
Moulton Park Business Centre  
Redhouse Road  
Northampton NN3 6AQ  
01604 497550



### **Asthma UK Adviceline**

Ask an asthma  
nurse specialist

**0800 121 62 44**

**asthma.org.uk/adviceline**

### **Asthma UK website**

Read the latest independent  
advice and news on asthma

**asthma.org.uk**

### **Asthma UK publications**

Request booklets, factfiles  
and other materials with  
independent, specialist  
information on every  
aspect of asthma

**0800 121 62 55**

**info@asthma.org.uk**

### **Asthma UK membership**

Become a member of  
Asthma UK and receive  
*Asthma Magazine* four times  
a year

**0800 121 62 55**

**membership@asthma.org.uk**

Asthma UK, Summit House, 70 Wilson Street, London EC2A 2DB

**T 020 7786 4900 F 020 7256 6075**

Asthma UK Cymru, Eastgate House, 35-43 Newport Road, Cardiff CF24 0AB

**T 02920 435 400 E wales@asthma.org.uk**

Asthma UK Northern Ireland, The Mount, 2 Woodstock Link, Belfast BT6 8DD

**T 02890 737290 F 02890 737289 E ni@asthma.org.uk**

Asthma UK Scotland, 4 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JE

**T 0131 226 2544 E scotland@asthma.org.uk**