

Inhaler technique training for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients

Editorial

Inhaler technique training with continued assessment needs to be a part of the routine management of any patient with COPD. Incorrect inhaler technique is common among patients with asthma or COPD. In COPD, incorrect technique and subsequent poor control leads to diminished quality of life due to unnecessary increases in medication dosage, exacerbations requiring oral corticosteroid treatments, and absences from work or school.

It is also important to note that inhaler technique training must be taught by a healthcare professional proficient in providing correct and understandable guidance. Depending on the specific practice, training could be given by several different healthcare stakeholders, including doctors, nurses, technicians, or pharmacists. It should not be assumed that healthcare professionals have correct inhaler technique. In fact, there is evidence, however, that the training is not always delivered by appropriately trained staff.

Incorrect Inhaler technique is particularly common among geriatric patients with COPD, whether using a pMDI or a DPI. Common errors with pMDI use include inadequate coordination of inspiration and actuation and inability to achieve a high enough inspiratory flow rate. Even with training, some will be unable to overcome these problems and may do better with a pMDI plus spacer. Many will also have difficulties connecting the inhaler to the spacer. Breath-activated inhaler (e.g. Autohaler) may be easier to use for these patients.

Patients with osteoarthritis may be unable to activate a pMDI easily, and may benefit from the use of a breath-activated inhaler.

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Mechanical difficulties can usually be overcome by analyzing a patient's capabilities, and then catering specific inhalers to those who can use them best.

A specially designed website called www.use-inhalers.com provides comprehensive training on correct inhaler technique and helps to control COPD by improving drug adherence and proper medicine intake.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.