

Asthma

We all dread it: the asthma patient who comes into the office wheezing and struggling to breathe. Our first thought is likely to be “This person needs to get to the ER immediately!” And yes, if your patient is having a severe life-threatening asthma attack, the ER is the best place for them. Here’s what to do while you wait for EMS to arrive:

Tip:

Administer Ventolin/salbutamol (ideally with a spacer) 2-6 puffs every 20 min for the first hour. Monitor the patient closely and continue treatment until peak flow readings improve to > 60-80% of the patient’s best/expected level.

Give oral corticosteroids EARLY to patients who are deteriorating quickly, not responding to Ventolin, or who have already increased their inhaler doses before arriving. (Prednisone 1 mg/kg/day to max 60 mg for 5-7 days; or dexamethasone 0.3-0.6 mg/kg/day to max 16 mg with one repeat in 24-36 hours (from UpToDate)).

Patient getting better? Review Asthma Action Plan, discuss how to monitor symptoms, observe inhaler technique, talk about what to do if symptoms worsen and schedule follow-up appointment for 1 week. Increase inhaled steroid for 2-4 weeks, or start one if they aren’t already on it. Consider giving an oral steroid prescription to take home for frequent exacerbations.

Patient getting transferred to the ER? Be ready to reassess them in the office in 2-7 days.

Trick:

Long before any asthma patient arrives at your office experiencing respiratory difficulties, it is important to take stock of what you have on hand to rapidly relieve their symptoms. Be sure to have Ventolin with a chamber, oral corticosteroids and controlled oxygen (tubing and nasal prongs) in the office. It is much better to have them at the ready and never need them than to **NOT** have them when your patient with asthma arrives in distress!

Printed instructions for all types of inhalers are found on the [asthma.ca](http://www.asthma.ca) website: <http://www.asthma.ca/adults/treatment/howToUse.php>

Signed up for Pathways? Inhaler education videos are available on <https://pathwaysbc.ca/> under Resources -> Patient Information -> Respiratory. You can email the videos directly to your patient from the Pathways website.