Using a Nebulizer

If you have asthma or other breathing problems, you might need to breathe in (*inhale*) medication. This can be done with a nebulizer. A nebulizer is a container that turns liquid medication into a mist that you can inhale.

There are different kinds of nebulizers. Most are small. With some, you breathe in through a mouthpiece. With others, a mask fits over your nose and mouth. Most nebulizers must be connected to a small air compressor. Some compressors can run on a battery or be plugged into an electrical outlet. Air is forced through tubing from the compressor to the nebulizer. The forced air changes the liquid into a fine spray.

PREPARATION

- Check your medication. Make sure it has not expired or damaged in any way.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Put all the parts of your nebulizer on a sturdy, flat surface. Make sure the tubing connects the compressor and the nebulizer.
- Measure the liquid medication according to your healthcare provider's instructions. Pour it into the nebulizer.
- Attach the mouthpiece or mask.
- To test the nebulizer, turn on to make sure a spray is coming out. Then, turn it off.

TREATMENT

- When using your nebulizer, remember to:
  - Sit down.
  - Stay relaxed.
  - Stop the machine if you start coughing.
  - Stop the machine if the medication foams or bubbles.
- To begin treatment:
  - If your nebulizer has a mask, put it over your nose and mouth. If you use a mouthpiece, put it in your mouth. Press your lips firmly around the mouthpiece.
  - Turn on the nebulizer.
  - Some nebulizers have a finger valve. If yours does, cover up the air hole so the air gets to the nebulizer.
  - Breathe out.
  - Once the medication begins to mist out, take slow, deep breaths. If there is a finger valve, release it at the end of your breath.
  - Continue taking slow, deep breaths until the nebulizer is empty.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

The nebulizer and all its parts must be kept very clean. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning. With most nebulizers, you should:

- Wash the nebulizer er each use. Use warm water and dish soap. Rinse them well. Shake them to remove extra water. Put them on a clean towel until they are completely dry.
  - To make sure everything is dry, put the nebulizer back together. Turn on the compressor for a few minutes. This will blow air through the nebulizer.
- Do not wash the tubing or the finger valve.
- Store the nebulizer in a dust-free place. That will keep it clean until you use it again.
- Inspect the filter every week. Replace it any time it looks dirty.

- Sometimes the nebulizer will need a more complete cleaning. The instruction booklet should say how often you need to do this.
  - Store the nebulizer in a dust-free place until you need it again.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Like with any device, things can go wrong. The nebulizer might not produce mister foam might come out. Sometimes a filter can get clogged or there might be a problem with the air compressor. Over time, you may need to replace some of the parts. They are usually made of plastic and will wear out. Check the instruction booklet that came with your nebulizer. It should tell you how to fix the problem or who to call for help. The nebulizer must work properly for it to aid your breathing.

Have at least one extra nebulizer at home. That way you will always have one when you need it.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You continue to have difficulty breathing.
- You have trouble using the nebulizer.

SOURCES

National Jewish Health, Denver
http://www.nationaljewish.org/healthinfo/medications/lung-diseases/devices/nebulizers/instructions.aspx

Children's Hospital Boston
http://www.childrenshospital.org/az/Site982/mainpageS982P0.html

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http://www.aanma.org/2009/06/nebulizers-mis/

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http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/asthma/inhaler_nebulizer.html
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U.S. National Library of Medicine
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000006.htm

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