In an emergency, if you are struggling to breathe and need a high dose of your reliever medicine, your health care professional may give it to you through a nebuliser. A nebuliser is a device that enables you to breathe in a medicine as a mist through a mask or a mouthpiece.

For most people with lung conditions, especially for people living with asthma and COPD, using a hand-held inhaler is easier and just as effective.

In some circumstances, such as if you are living with cystic fibrosis or bronchiectasis, your health care professional may arrange for you to use a nebuliser at home.

What is a nebuliser?

A nebuliser is a device that helps you take your medication. It changes liquid medicine into a fine mist. You then breathe in the mist through a mouthpiece or a mask.

There are a many different types of nebulisers available, such as jet nebulisers and ultrasonic nebulisers. Ultrasonic nebulisers can be expensive and not often used outside hospitals.

When are nebulisers used?

Nebulisers can be the best way to deliver a dose of medicine to someone who is struggling to breathe. So nebulisers are usually used in emergency situations to deliver high doses of medication.

They are also a way of giving drugs to people who cannot use another device, such as very young children.

Your consultant may also decide to arrange a nebuliser for you to use at home in some circumstances.

A number of different medications can be given using a nebuliser, including salt water solutions and antibiotics. Medications are usually administered through a mask, but there are some possible side effects if they get in your eyes, so some can only be safely delivered through a mouthpiece.
Who can benefit from using a nebuliser?
As part of your treatment, you might be offered drugs delivered by a nebuliser if you have:

- **COPD**: There is no evidence that nebulisers are more effective at delivering drugs than hand-held inhalers as part of your usual treatment. But you may use a nebuliser in hospital if you have a severe flare-up.
- **Bronchiectasis**: Nebulisers can be used to deliver medications to help reduce the thickness of your phlegm so it’s easier to cough it out, and to deliver antibiotics if you have a bacterial infection.
- **Cystic fibrosis**: Nebulisers are used to deliver medications to control the build-up of mucus and other symptoms if you have cystic fibrosis.

Nebulisers can also be used in palliative care and to give drugs to very young children, such as those with viral bronchiolitis.

If you have asthma, you are unlikely to be offered a nebuliser for routine use. Most people with asthma don’t need to use a nebuliser routinely. The latest research shows that using a reliever inhaler with a spacer is easier and just as effective for treating mild to moderate asthma.

---

**Spacers make it easier to get the right amount of medicine from your inhaler**

Spacers are large, empty containers that are usually made of plastic. You fix your inhaler on one end and use the mouthpiece at the other end. When you press on your inhaler to release your medicine, the medicine collects in the chamber of the spacer, so you can breathe in the medicine without needing to get the timing and speed exactly right.

---

In an emergency, you should go straight to hospital.

**Can I get a nebuliser for home use?**

Medications used with a nebuliser can be provided on prescription, but the nebuliser itself isn’t always available on the NHS. However, if your consultant or specialist respiratory clinic decides you would benefit from using a nebuliser at home, they may arrange this for you. The nebuliser will belong to the hospital or your community respiratory service. They will be responsible for its service and maintenance.

In some areas, a local respiratory service may provide the device without charge, but if this isn’t an option, you may have to pay for a device.

If your health care professional arranges a nebuliser for you, it is important that he or she arranges for you or your carer to be trained to use it. You should also be shown how to look after it and how to make sure it is working properly.

Research has shown that it is not that easy to use a nebuliser to get the best results at home. So make sure you have a plan agreed with your health care professional about when to use a nebuliser. You should also discuss possible side effects. Your plan should also cover what to do in an emergency, if the nebuliser breaks down, or is very slow.

We recommend that you only use a nebuliser at home only if your health care professional has recommended one for you. It is also important that you or your carer have been trained about using it and you are prescribed medications to be used with a nebuliser.
How should I look after a nebuliser?
You should always follow the instructions from the nebuliser’s manufacturer.

All nebulisers need to be maintained and cleaned. If your health care professional arranges one for you, they should give you information about this.

It’s a good idea to clean your nebuliser every day if you use one regularly. After each use, the mask, mouthpiece and chamber should be disconnected, disassembled and washed in warm soapy water. The components should be left to air dry.

Components such as mouthpieces, masks and tubing and the nebuliser’s chamber should be changed regularly, at least every three to four months.

To avoid cross infection, you should never use other people’s mouthpieces, masks or tubing.

You should also use a different mouthpiece or mask and tubing for antibiotics if you’re prescribed nebulised antibiotics alongside your other nebulised medication.

Travel
If you need a nebuliser when you are away from home, tell your health care professional about your travel plans. They can advise you how to ensure you have a nebuliser available and prescribe the medication you will need.

We have more detailed information about going on holiday with a lung condition here. The key is planning. You will need to check with your travel provider that you can carry a nebuliser in your hand luggage and, while away, always carry lists of your prescribed medications.