



Could I Benefit From a Nebulizer?

The use of inhaled medication plays an important role in the treatment of most respiratory disease. The frontline medications for COPD and asthma are all inhaled medications including albuterol (Proventil®), ipratropium (Atrovent®), and inhaled steroids (e.g., Azmacort®). For these medications to work effectively, an effective delivery system must be used to deposit the aerosolized drug to the airway. When used appropriately, both nebulizers and inhalers adequately deliver medication. The problem often comes in the three words, “when used appropriately.” Nearly all patients are started on inhalers first but there are some important considerations in deciding which patients may do better with the nebulizer:



- **Poor Inhaler Technique** – Studies have demonstrated that many people using inhalers do not use them correctly, which can result in poor delivery of the medication. Using an inhaler properly requires up to 10 steps. As many as 50-75% of patients do not use their inhaler properly. Factors that increase the likelihood of poor inhaler technique include age over 65, poor hand strength or dexterity, and poor memory or concentration.
- **Expense** – Inhalers are typically paid as an “out-of-pocket” expense. For patients on multiple inhalers, this expense can be as high as \$150 per month or more. Many patients may be forced to “ration” their medications to make ends meet, which can result in poor control of their disease. Nebulizers and the nebulizer medication are both covered by Medicare when appropriate.
- **Too Little Medication** – The standard dosage used by most patients for ipratropium (aka, Atrovent®) and albuterol (Proventil®) is 2 puffs, four times per day. Clinical studies have shown that the best or “optimal” dosage is higher in many COPD patients (Never increase your dosage without talking to your doctor). If a patient uses inhalers at optimal levels, the inconvenience and the cost could be prohibitive. Because the nebulizer delivers a larger dose with each treatment, optimal dosages are more easily obtained with a nebulizer treatment, resulting in better control of symptoms.
- **Convenience** – With a nebulizer, all inhaled medications can be combined into a single treatment. No need to use 2-3 different inhalers. Also, the nebulizer and medications are delivered directly to the patient’s home. Each month, a company representative will contact the patient to reorder a new supply of medication and nebulizers. If the patient is experiencing any problems, a respiratory clinician is available for follow up.