

Treating Asthma with Inhaled Steroids: Comparing Effectiveness, Safety, and Price

Inhaled steroids are used to treat asthma. They help prevent symptoms and reduce emergency room visits.

If you have asthma attacks more than two times a week, talk to your doctor about inhaled steroids.

What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease in which the airways become irritated. Airways are tiny tubes that carry air through the lungs. In asthma, the airways can become inflamed. They can swell and fill up with mucus. This makes it hard to breathe.

How is asthma treated?

Some people only need treatment during an asthma attack. But many people also need treatment to help prevent attacks.

- **Treatment during an attack:** Everyone with asthma should have a “quick-relief” inhaler to use during an asthma attack.
- **Preventing attacks:** If you have asthma attacks more than two times a week, you should use an inhaled steroid to help prevent attacks. (LABAs—long-acting bronchodilators—are also preventive, but they have serious side effects.)

Should I use inhaled steroids or a pill?

Inhaled steroids act directly on the airways. You can use a lower dose, compared to taking a steroid pill. This reduces the risk of side effects.

Avoid “triggers” that cause your attacks.


Many things can cause asthma attacks. These things are called “triggers.” You can help control asthma by avoiding triggers such as smoking, pet dander, or mold.


Side effects and safety of inhaled steroids.

- The most common side effects are mouth and throat irritation, cough, and hoarseness. These usually go away.
- Another side effect is a mouth or throat infection called “thrush.” Help prevent this by using a spacer device and rinsing your mouth well with water each time, after using an inhaler.
- Talk to your doctor before taking inhaled steroids while pregnant.
- Tell your doctor about any other drugs or supplements you take.

Our advice:

All the inhaled steroids work well to reduce symptoms and prevent asthma attacks. We chose the following as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*:

 **Beclomethasone** (QVAR)—for adults and children ages 5 years and older

 Generic **budesonide** suspension nebulizer—for children one year old and older

These drugs are as safe and effective as the others, and they cost less.

Your actual cost will depend on how many puffs a day you need. Also, find out if your health plan pays for any of the inhaled steroids. This can save you a lot of money.







There are different kinds of inhaler devices. Your doctor can help you choose one and learn to use it correctly.

Inhaled Steroids for Asthma: Drug Comparison Chart

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue. We recommend these drugs because they work as well and are as safe as the other drugs, and they cost less.

This is a summary of a longer report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Best Buy	Generic Name & Strength	Form	Brand Name	Average Cost per Month ¹	Puffs/Amount per Day ²
	Beclomethasone 40 mcg	Inhaler	QVAR	\$142	4
	Beclomethasone 80 mcg	Inhaler	QVAR	\$177	4
	Budesonide 0.25mg/2 mL	Suspension nebulizer	Pulmicort Respules	\$330	2 mL
	Budesonide 0.25 mg/2 mL	Suspension nebulizer	Generic	\$232	2 mL
	Budesonide 0.5 mg/2mL	Suspension nebulizer	Pulmicort Respules	\$435	2 mL
	Budesonide 0.5 mg/2 mL	Suspension nebulizer	Generic	\$267	2 mL
	Budesonide 1 mg/2 mL	Suspension nebulizer	Pulmicort Respules	\$778	2 mL
	Budesonide 90 mcg	Aerosol powder	Pulmicort Flexhaler	\$149	2
	Budesonide 180 mcg	Aerosol powder	Pulmicort Flexhaler	\$200	4
	Ciclesonide 80 mcg	Inhaler	Alvesco	\$187	2
	Ciclesonide 160 mcg	Inhaler	Alvesco	\$183	2
	Fluticasone 44 mcg	Inhaler	Flovent HFA	\$139	4
	Fluticasone 110 mcg	Inhaler	Flovent HFA	\$191	4
	Fluticasone 220 mcg	Inhaler	Flovent HFA	\$307	4
	Fluticasone 50 mcg	Inhaler	Flovent Diskus	\$145	2
	Fluticasone 100 mcg	Inhaler	Flovent Diskus	\$150	2
	Fluticasone 250 mcg	Inhaler	Flovent Diskus	\$194	2
	Mometasone 110 mcg	Inhaler (30 puffs per inhaler) ³	Asmanex Twisthaler	\$173	1
	Mometasone 220 mcg	Inhaler (30 puffs per inhaler) ³	Asmanex Twisthaler	\$191	1
	Mometasone 220 mcg	Inhaler (60 puffs per inhaler) ³	Asmanex Twisthaler	\$203	2
	Mometasone 220 mcg	Inhaler (120 puffs per inhaler) ³	Asmanex Twisthaler	\$282	4

¹ Prices reflect nationwide retail average for August 2013, rounded to the nearest dollar. This information is derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Symphony Health Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

² As usually prescribed or recommended based on FDA-approved labeling.

³ This drug comes in an inhaler programmed to deliver a specified number of puffs.