

Asthma Care in Winter

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Here are some suggestions for “winter” asthma care:

There are more triggers during the winter months (like weather change, cold weather, germs, and infections), so we expect that many asthma patients will have more trouble during the winter. If you are not checking your peak flows anymore (you still can!) to see how you are doing, remember that once you start to feel symptoms in your chest, you should think of using your Albuterol and QVAR again.

If you need to use your Albuterol inhaler more than two days a week for symptoms that occur when you are not exercising, start using QVAR by taking two puffs twice a day to help prevent inflammation and swelling. Albuterol does not prevent inflammation. After just one bad night of being bothered by asthma, start using QVAR for two puffs twice a day. During the winter, asthma patients can, as a general rule, use QVAR for at least two weeks without any problems before reducing to one puff twice a day for another two weeks. During this time, tracking peak flows will be useful.

Another way to look at how you are doing is to estimate how much Albuterol you are using. Each Albuterol canister has about 200 puffs. If you need the Albuterol just for sports or PE, one canister should last at least three months (two puffs per day for 90 days equals 180 puffs). If you don't think the Albuterol is helping, make sure your technique is correct (use the spacer if you are not using one). If you are going through too many Albuterol canisters, something is not right. Since QVAR has only 100 puffs per canister, many patients should be using more QVAR canisters than Albuterol during their most critical season. Although QVAR does not make you feel better, it is best used to prevent asthma during your worst time of the year. During your bad season, you should be using **more** QVAR than Albuterol canisters.

When you get sick or catch a cold, always use the Albuterol first, and try to get at least four puffs of QVAR by bedtime the first day. Most people have more trouble with their asthma at night. When you are sick, make sure you are doing okay before you go to sleep. This will help you avoid needing to go to the emergency department in the middle of the night.

For patients who have Singulair, it is best used to help the QVAR work better. If you are using QVAR for two puffs twice a day and still need the Albuterol more than two days a week to feel your asthma is under control, then using Singulair or another inhaler called Serevent is the next step.

Last but not least, every asthma patient is not the same. If you're not sure that you are doing okay with your asthma, please feel free to call and ask. You can reach me through the advice center, 650-742-2050, or call Jane Diaz, our asthma nurse, at 650-301-4450.