Asthma and airway conditions prompts

SHOW

Ask your patient

"Can you show me everything you use to help you breathe (inhalers, etc) and tell me why and when you use each one? Now, can you show me how you use them?"

The patient should:

- bring out all the inhalers and other devices they have to control their breathing
- describe when they use each device
- show how they use the devices.

While the patient is demonstrating their device(s):

CHECK

Ask yourself

"Is this therapy right for this patient?"

Check the patient's:

- confidence in using their devices
- use of correct breath-hold and after-breath steps
- inspiratory ability (Can they generate enough flow for their inhaler?)
- cough or intolerance (Would another device be more suitable?)
- oral care (Are they rinsing and gargling after inhaled corticosteroid (ICS) use?)
- if the patient is a child: 1–4 years – use of a face mask and spacer, with a good seal; > 4 years old – use of a spacer and mouthpiece without the mask.
  (Note: Older children may need to use a facemask when severely unwell.)
- if using a metered-dose inhaler (MDI), coordination pressing and breathing with the appropriate use of a clean spacer
- dexterity (Can they press, load, twist or manipulate the device? Would a different device be more helpful?)

continued over page ▶

CHECK

- unnecessary duplication and inappropriate medicine combinations
- appropriate use of preventer and over/under use of reliever over a 12-month period
- barriers (cost, access, supply, lifestyle, forgetfulness, cultural considerations and side effects)
- exacerbations (Review dispensing of oral corticosteroid courses, antibiotics, urgent and emergency department visits and hospital admissions over 12 months).

If the patient is stable, happy and using their inhaler correctly, don't change their therapy without a good reason.

PLAN

Ask your patient

"What is your normal routine and what do you do when things change or get worse?"

- Provide a personalised written action plan or review an existing one.
- Discuss relevant triggers (for example, review smoking/vaping and vaccination status) and practical ways to reduce or manage exposure.
- Confirm the patient:
  - understands when to contact their usual health care team, seek urgent care or call for emergency help
  - can explain the plan back to you.

NEXT STEPS

- If your patient is stable, consider their ongoing routine care and when their next review should take place.
- If you still have concerns, consider referrals and follow-up.

More resources are available through the Health Quality & Safety Commission Te Tāhū Hauora website at: hqsc.govt.nz/apsd2026

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