The Pros and Cons of Over-the-Counter Asthma Inhalers

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Over-the-Counter Asthma Inhalers

As an asthmatic, I never knew you could buy over-the-counter asthma inhalers. To be honest, I have to say that I have been blessed. As a child, my father had adequate insurance to cover my inhalers.

When my asthma symptoms were bad, I remember having a nebulizer; I never had any concept of where the nebulizer came from – just that one day my parents picked up the equipment, and the next day (perhaps an exaggeration) I was feeling better.

As an adult in my 30s, I had my own insurance before I got married. I have my husband's insurance now. I have never had a time in my life where I have been uninsured or underinsured. Meaning – when I need to pay for inhalers, steroids, or antibiotics related to my asthma, I have been able to.

So, when I Googled "over-the-counter asthma inhalers" I was shocked. I had never seen them – even as an RN for 10 years.

Here are the pros and cons of using over-the-counter inhalers for asthma.

The Pros of Over-the-Counter Inhalers for Asthma

There are a lot of different types available. For example, you can find battery-powered inhalers that use steam to open up the nasal passages and the airways, as well as inhalers that use essential oils.

Several of the inhalers I found were single-use devices, meaning you can pack a couple in your bag and toss it out when you are done, so you are not lugging around your inhaler with you everywhere.

Some of the options are relatively inexpensive. For example, Walmart has options starting at $3.46 (although I cannot find how many inhalations are in the inhaler and it is more for cold symptoms as opposed to asthma).

Some of the options available are homeopathic, so they are generally considered natural and safe.

The Cons of Over-the-Counter Inhalers for Asthma

The single-use devices were pricy. For example, Asthmanefrin is $30.49 for 30 vials. While this equates to about to about $0.90 per vial, if you have insurance, a copay for an inhaled steroid may be cheaper.

Some of the options available are homeopathic, so they are considered natural and safe. Yes, this was listed in the pros column, but it can also be a con as well. Why? Homeopathic medications are classified as drugs by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

In fact, “OTC homeopathic medicines are indicated for self-limiting, self-diagnosable conditions such as cold symptoms, headaches, indigestion. All homeopathic medicines must comply with FDA labeling requirements and be manufactured in accordance with Current Good Manufacturing Practices.”

This is all well and good when you have got a cold, a sore throat, or a runny nose. The key word here is self-diagnosable condition, as asthma is not a self-diagnosable condition and requires a physician to diagnose it.

None of the over-the-counter medications contain ingredients that are known to effectively treat asthma in the long run, such as inhaled steroids.

What Can You Do?

Maybe you use over-the-counter asthma inhalers because hey, your asthma isn’t that bad! These inhalers work pretty well for you during the brief instances you need it! That’s great!

However, if you are using them frequently because you cannot afford your inhalers, it is time to have a heart-to-heart with your physician. There may be ways that they can help you afford your inhalers.

Inhalers are expensive. There may be a cheaper alternative. Also, if you have commercial insurance, you may be eligible for a copay card if you are prescribed a name brand inhaler. You may also find prescription insurance programs if you dig around. Utilize them. Your community may even have programs.

Remember – your breathing and overall quality of life are important!