

UPDATED TREATMENT OPTIONS

FOR PEOPLE WITH MODERATE
TO SEVERE ASTHMA



People with moderate to severe asthma usually need to use a regular daily or twice daily inhaled medication to keep their symptoms under control, maintain their quality of life and reduce their risk of having an asthma flare-up.

The Australian Asthma Handbook update (AAH; National Asthma Council, Australia) has included a new combination preventer inhaler for use by people with moderate to severe asthma. It's called **Fostair** and contains **beclometasone and formoterol** in a fixed dose combination in one inhaler device.

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a long-term lung condition of the airways (the passage that transports air into our lungs). At the moment there is no cure, but for most people it can be managed. Asthma is recognised by the following:

- Tightening of the airways
- Swelling and inflammation in the airways
- Mucus production inside the airways

These lead to asthma symptoms like breathlessness, cough, chest tightness and wheeze.

Asthma is considered moderate to severe when a person requires regular daily or twice daily use of a combination preventer inhaler (see below) to manage their symptoms.

HOW IS ASTHMA TREATED?

Preventers

The main goal of asthma treatment is to obtain control and prevent 'asthma attacks' or 'flare-ups'. The most important treatment therefore, is anti-inflammatory medicine to treat the inflammation which causes the swelling and mucus production. This is effective for most people with asthma in keeping symptoms at bay. The most common and recommended anti-inflammatory medicines, known as **preventers**, are inhaled, and they work in the lungs, where the inflammation happens.

Relievers

The other part of an asthma treatment plan includes the use of a bronchodilator, which aims to relax the muscles in the airways. Commonly known as blue/grey relievers, these medicines are also inhaled and provide quick relief of symptoms. **Relievers** only treat the symptoms but do not treat the cause of asthma. Relievers should only be needed to treat symptoms that break through despite tailored **preventer** treatment.

Combination preventers

Some inhaled preventers come in combination form, and they are called **combination preventer** inhalers. They contain both the **preventer** and **reliever** types of medications and they work by both reducing the inflammation in the airways (anti-inflammatory) and relaxing the tight airway muscles (bronchodilator). **Combination preventers** contain two medications: an inhaled corticosteroid to reduce inflammation, and a long-acting medication to relax tight airway muscles.

Preventer medications are the mainstay of asthma treatment because they treat the underlying cause of asthma symptoms to prevent them from occurring.



WHAT IS FOSTAIR?

Fostair is a **combination preventer** inhaler available by prescription for adults (18 years and older) with moderate to severe asthma. Fostair is not approved for use for people under the age of 18 years.

Fostair can be used in two ways:

- 1. As a preventer –**
Prescribed for twice daily use and accompanied by a rapidly acting reliever (blue/grey reliever) to treat worsening symptoms as needed, and
- 2. As a maintenance and reliever therapy –**
Prescribed for regular twice daily use and to be used to treat worsening symptoms as needed.



Preventers can take up to a few weeks to work at their best, and it is common that a treatment trial of 4-8 weeks will be prescribed by your doctor to be sure that your prescription is effective at controlling your asthma.

Fostair is not intended for regular use before exercise. If you experience symptoms during exercise or activity, discuss with your health care professional how best to manage your symptoms, the best medications for your situation and update your written **Asthma Action Plan**.

It is important to keep taking preventers such as Fostair every day even when you feel well, to keep your airways healthy and maintain ongoing, good asthma control.

Fostair as a maintenance and reliever therapy

Fostair may also be prescribed to be used both as your regular preventer and as a reliever when you experience asthma symptoms. For this treatment, your doctor will prescribe 1 puff twice per day and advise you to take 1 puff in case you experience sudden asthma symptoms. The maximum daily dose of Fostair using this regime is 8 puffs in one day. If you need to take 6 reliever puffs for 2 or more days in a row to control your symptoms, make an appointment with your doctor to review your asthma control, asthma medications and other factors.

Make sure you have an updated written **Asthma Action Plan** which includes instructions for how to use your medication and when to seek help from a health care professional.

It is also important to know the appropriate Asthma First Aid steps in case of an emergency.

HOW TO TAKE FOSTAIR

- 1** Remove the protective cap from the mouthpiece

- 2** Breathe out as slowly and deeply as possible

- 3** Hold the canister vertically with its body upwards and put your lips around the mouthpiece. Do not bite the mouthpiece

- 4** Breathe in slowly and deeply through your mouth and, just after starting to breathe in press down firmly on the top of the inhaler to release one puff

- 5** Hold your breath for as long as possible and, finally, remove the inhaler from your mouth and breathe out

If you need to take another puff, keep the inhaler in the vertical position for about half a minute, then repeat steps 2 to 5 slowly. Do not breathe into the inhaler.

For patients with a weak hand grip, it may be easier to hold the inhaler with both hands. The index fingers should be placed on the top of the inhaler canister and both thumbs on the base of the inhaler.

If you find it difficult to coordinate the steps, you might find a spacer makes it easier and more effective. As with all preventer inhalers with inhaled corticosteroid, it is important to rinse your mouth, gargle with water and spit out to avoid side effects.

For step-by-step instructions on how to use devices, [follow this link](#).

WHEN TO REPLACE THE DEVICE

Fostair has a dose counter on the back of the device. When new, the dose counter should read 120.

When the dose counter or indicator shows the number 20, this is a good time to get a refill on your prescription. Ensure when the dose counter shows 0 you have a new inhaler ready to go, as any puffs left in the device may not be enough to release a full dose.

When you fill a prescription at the pharmacy the medication will have been kept in the fridge. There is no need to keep it in the fridge at home, but it is important to keep it in a cooler dry location, and not in the glove box of the car. Discuss storage of your inhaler with your pharmacist.

Do not use your inhaler beyond 2 months after you get it from the pharmacy and never if it's expired.



WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

It is recommended to see your doctor about your asthma at least once per year. This should be more frequent for children, the elderly, pregnant women and regularly during periods of poor asthma control.

If you have good asthma control on your regular medication regimen, it is likely that your doctor will recommend you stay on your current asthma management regime. If you have variable asthma control or persistent poor control, a discussion with your doctor is always recommended. Take the **Asthma Control Test** to determine your level of control.

When starting a new treatment, people with asthma should be reassessed by a doctor within 4-8 weeks. It is important to ensure that your medication is enabling good asthma control.

Always take medications as prescribed and discuss the amount and timing of doses with your treating health care professional. Ensure all medications for your asthma control are included on a written **Asthma Action Plan** with specific instructions on how many inhalations of medication and when to take them; and what to do if medication is not as effective as it has been, or asthma control is worsening.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information on the Fostair inhaler or to speak with an Asthma Educator about your asthma, call **1800 ASTHMA** (1800 278 462).



REFERENCES

1. National Asthma Council Australia. Australian Asthma Handbook, Version 2.1. National Asthma Council Australia, Melbourne, 2020. Website. Available from: <http://www.astmahandbook.org.au>
2. Fostair consumer medicines information: <https://www.ebs.tga.gov.au/ebs/picmi/picmirepository.nsf/pdf?OpenAgent&id=CP-2020-CMI-02294-1&d=202012101016933>