



Asthma drugs

We're focused on helping members like you manage your asthma symptoms. We think one of the best ways to do that is to help you access a wide variety of asthma drugs. That way you and your doctor can find treatments that are right for you.

When choosing medicine for our drug list, we use the strongest clinical studies we can find. And we look at how asthma drugs work for real members in their everyday lives. Because with the right treatment, asthma can be just one small part of your active, busy life.



Asthma makes it hard to breathe

Asthma is a condition that's caused by inflammation or swelling of the air passages in your body. This makes breathing difficult. Symptoms may include: chest tightness, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing and waking up at night. Not everyone has the same asthma symptoms. And they may vary in how often they occur and how severe they are.

Some things that may trigger an asthma attack are strong smells, cigarette smoke, cold air, exercise, pollen and pet dander.

Medicine can help you control your asthma. If left untreated, asthma can lead to ER visits and hospital stays. So it's important for your doctor to diagnose your asthma and treat it in the best way.

How we choose asthma medicines for the drug list

Here's a step-by-step look at how we find the best asthma medicines for the drug list — the list of prescription drugs offered by your plan.

Step 1: Clinical review and rating

First, doctors and pharmacists — who are not our employees — look at the best quality scientific research on asthma drugs. They use a detailed report prepared by our pharmacists to review the strongest clinical studies. This report starts with information from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about each drug's approved uses, dosages and safety. The report also shows how well drugs work and how safe they are.

The doctors and pharmacists also look at information that shows how these drugs work in real life, not just in trials. Finally, they look at all the data to rate which drugs will work the best for members like you.

Step 2: Cost review

Next, we use the drug ratings from the first step. We look at how often doctors choose the best-rated drugs for patients. Then, we review drug costs to make sure the best medicines are affordable for you. We consider drug costs only after we've looked at how well the drugs work.

Step 3: Choosing drugs

We choose asthma medicines for the drug list that are safe, work well and offer the best value. Based on all the information, we decided:

- Our drug list should include lots of different asthma drugs. This gives you and your doctor options for treating your symptoms and preventing attacks.
- Many asthma drugs should be offered at lower and moderate costs. This helps keep drug benefits affordable.
- Your asthma treatment plan should be designed just for you. Many asthma drugs are included on the drug list, so your doctor can prescribe the right mix of drugs and customize your treatment plan.



We're helping people make good choices about taking asthma drugs

We found that members who took inhaled steroid drugs exactly as their doctor instructed had to go to the hospital less often than those who didn't. Fewer trips to the hospital means these drugs work best for controlling asthma symptoms and preventing attacks.

But, it's easier for some people to take drugs like montelukast (generic Singulair) because they can swallow the medicine instead of inhale it. These people are more likely to take their asthma medicine if it's easier for them.

That's why your drug plan includes both inhaled steroids, because they work very well, and drugs like generic Singulair, because they may be easier to take. So you have drug choices that work well and are simple to use.



Asthma drugs included in the drug list

Quick-relief inhaled drugs that treat asthma attacks

Some asthma drugs are for quick relief. They're taken only when you need them to stop an asthma attack. You inhale these drugs.

They work quickly to help you breathe more freely. *Everyone with asthma should have one of these drugs to treat asthma attacks.*

Quick-relief asthma drugs			
Drug type	Lower cost (generics)	Medium cost	Higher cost
Inhaled quick-relief drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> albuterol nebulizer solution (generic AccuNeb) levalbuterol nebulizer solution (generic Xopenex) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ProAir HFA (albuterol) Ventolin HFA (albuterol) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AccuNeb nebulizer solution (albuterol) Maxair (pirbuterol) Proventil HFA (albuterol) Xopenex concentrated nebulizer solution (levalbuterol) Xopenex nebulizer solution (levalbuterol) Xopenex HFA (levalbuterol)

Inhaled drugs taken daily to prevent attacks

Some asthma drugs control symptoms and prevent asthma attacks. These drugs are taken every day. Inhaled steroids are anti-inflammatory asthma drugs that reduce swelling and mucus inside the airways in your body. Other drugs called bronchodilators relax muscles around the airways. They make it easier for you to breathe.

Taking inhaled steroids is the best way to prevent asthma attacks and control symptoms. If you still have symptoms, a long-acting bronchodilator should be used with an inhaled steroid, but not by itself.

You may find it's easier to use one inhaler that combines a steroid and bronchodilator when you need both.

Asthma drugs that prevent attacks and control symptoms			
Drug type	Lower cost (generics)	Medium cost	Higher cost
Inhaled steroids	budesonide respules (generic Pulmicort)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asmanex (mometasone) Flovent Diskus/HFA (fluticasone) Pulmicort Flexhaler (budesonide) Pulmicort Respules (budesonide) 1 mg/2 ml QVAR (beclomethasone) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aerospan HFA (flunisolide) Alvesco (ciclesonide) Pulmicort Respules (budesonide) 0.25 mg/ml and 0.50 mg/ml
Inhaled long-acting bronchodilators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foradil (formoterol) Serevent (salmeterol) 	
Inhaled combination products		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advair Diskus/HFA (fluticasone/salmeterol) Dulera (mometasone/formoterol) Symbicort (budesonide/formoterol) 	



Drugs taken by mouth daily to prevent asthma attacks and symptoms

Tablets that you swallow are another option. You can use them instead of inhaled steroids. Singulair is an example of this type

of asthma drug. Unlike other similar drugs, Singulair has chewable and granule forms for children as young as six months. Singulair can also be used to treat seasonal allergies, and it only needs to be taken once daily.

Asthma drugs taken by mouth to prevent attacks and control symptoms			
Drug type	Lower cost (generics)	Medium cost	Higher cost
Oral leukotriene modifiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> montelukast (Singulair) tablet, chewable tablet, granules zafirlukast (generic Accolate) tablet 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accolate (zafirlukast) tablet Singulair (montelukast) tablet, chewable tablet, granules Zyflo/Zyflo CR (zileuton) tablet, extended release tablet



Asthma drugs that aren't used very often but are on the drug list

- Theophylline and cromolyn are older drugs that aren't usually the first choice for treating asthma. They can be used instead of inhaled steroids or along with inhaled steroids.
- Xolair is another asthma drug that isn't used often. Only people who have severe asthma with year-round allergies should use Xolair.

Talk to your doctor about the best way to treat your asthma.