FACTS AND FALLACIES ABOUT INHALED CORTICOSTEROIDS

What Are Corticosteroids?

Corticosteroids, e.g. cortisone, are part of a family of substances which are produced by the body to help it function normally. They are natural agents that prevent inflammation. The corticosteroids used to treat asthma are similar to your own naturally occurring cortisone.

Corticosteroids are not the same as the anabolic steroids that some athletes and body-builders use to enhance their muscles and gain strength. Anabolic steroids can have serious side effects.

Why Should I Use Corticosteroids?

The symptoms you may experience with asthma (such as difficulty in breathing, wheezing, coughing and waking up at night) occur when the small tubes that carry air into your lungs become over sensitive to a variety of "triggers" and react by becoming narrower. This makes it harder for air to move in and out of your lungs, so that breathing gets more difficult.

Your breathing tubes narrow because they become inflamed (swollen and red like the effects you see with a joint sprain) and the muscles tighten around your tubes with excess mucus being produced.

Corticosteroids (brown/orange inhalers) are preventers. They are the most effective agents for treating the swelling and inflammation in your breathing tubes. In the long term, this will help to reduce the number of problems you have with asthma, decrease the amount of medication you need and help prevent your asthma from interfering with your enjoyment of life. The important thing is to take your preventer regularly.

Relievers (blue inhalers) have only short-term benefits. They help to relieve your symptoms by relaxing the muscles around your breathing tubes. Use them when you need instant relief. Relievers do not affect the swelling and inflammation, which are the underlying problems. If you don't get rid of the inflammation, you will continue to have the symptoms (like painting over rust without removing the rust first). You may even make your asthma worse.