

Optimal Usage of Inhalers in Severe Asthma

Division of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Department of Internal Medicine,
Seoul National University Bundang Hospital, Seoul National University College of Medicine, Seongnam,
Seoul National University Medical Research Center, Seoul, Korea

Yoon-Seok Chang

In the management of severe asthma, optimal treatment with inhalers are crucial. Difficult-to-treat asthma is about 17% of asthma that is uncontrolled despite of GINA step 4 or 5 treatment or that requires such treatment to maintain good symptom control and reduce the risk of exacerbation according to Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA). Severe asthma is about 3.7% and defined as a subset of difficult-to-treat asthma that is uncontrolled despite adherence with maximal optimized therapy and treatment of contributory factors, or that worsens when high dose treatment is decreased according to GINA.

In any case, it means that the patients are using medium or high dose inhaled corticosteroids with at least a second controller. Some physicians may prefer to prescribe medium dose inhaled corticosteroids with second or third controllers while others may prefer high dose inhaled corticosteroids with other controllers. As the second or third controllers, physician may prefer to add tiotropium, xanthines, or leukotriene receptor antagonists to inhaled corticosteroids. There are things to consider before the prescription.

It is always important to check the inhaler technique and adherence. Physicians should assess not only symptoms, exacerbations, and lung function, but also the possible side effects by medications including inhalers, the frequency of short acting beta2 agonist usage, and patient satisfaction.

It is also important to provide proper education on severe asthma, the importance of inhaler therapy, and the inhaler technique for severe asthma patients. The educational materials including books, booklets, leaflets, and video clips on inhaler technique are available from reliable resources such as the Korea Asthma Allergy Foundation, Atopy-Asthma Education Information Centers, and Korean Centers for Disease Control.

During the management of severe asthma with inhalers, the communication and relationship between physician and the patients are very essential to enhance the adherence and treatment outcome. Shared decision making process could be helpful and beneficial.