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Beta Adrenergic Drugs

These drugs belong to a group of bronchodilators. They work by opening the airways and they are the first line of therapy for patients with asthma. The current recommendations for the use of BAD are only for breakthrough symptoms on an as needed basis. In other words you do not need to use them if you are not having symptoms.

They are to be started as soon as the first symptoms of asthma appear (cough, difficulty breathing, wheezing, etc.) If relief is not obtained within the first 12 to 24 hours we should be contacted immediately.

They can be given as often as every two hours in acute situations. If you find it necessary to do this more than 3 times in six hours, most likely you are having significant respiratory distress and need immediate medical attention. In most cases they are used as needed. If you are using a BAD more than three to four times a day as a sole therapy for asthma, it is likely your asthma is not in very good control.

How Supplied

A metered dose inhaler (spray), a breath activated device, a dry powder and a solution for use with a nebulizer or breathing machine.

Adrenergic drugs can also be used for exercise induced asthma. Usually 2 puffs 20 to 30 minutes before exercise.

Foradil and Serevent are long acting forms of BAD and are to be taken only every 12 hours. They are not to be used as a reliever medication or when you are having an "asthma attack".

Side Effects

Tremor is the most common side effect. Nausea and nervousness can also occur. These side effects are self limited and usually do not require treatment. There have been increasing concerns that this medication, when used indiscriminately, may associated with worsening of asthma. When BAD are used on a daily basis, particularly if a preventive asthma medication is not being used, there appears to be worsening of asthma symptoms. There is also increased caution for the use of more than one canister of the BAD in a one month period.

Overuse of BAD serves as a marker for severe asthma. It is believed that these drugs cause a temporary relief of symptoms, causing patients to delay seeking medical care during acute asthma episodes. Patients and physicians should therefore stay alert when treatment with BAD is required more than three to four times per 24 hour. This may be an indication of poor asthma control.

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