

Taking a Deep Breath during Albuterol Shortage

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Pharmacies are dealing with a shortage nationwide of the medication used to treat breathing conditions as result of an Illinois manufacturer shutting down three facilities this year, and filing for bankruptcy in 2020.

Melody Bauman, a physician assistant with OSF Medical Group – Lung & Pulmonology, is keeping in close contact with pharmacies because of the shortage.

“They’re letting us know they have a backorder of albuterol,” Bauman says. “The good thing so far- is that it seems it’s only impacting the nebulize solution of albuterol. It’s a liquid vial that patients would put in a nebulizer to give themselves a breathing treatment or a mist.”

Bauman says there are inhalers with the same medication her office can still prescribe patients. She says it’s important to take a deep breath during this shortage, and talk with your health care provider.

“The biggest thing I’d say is not to panic,” she says. “We are here to help patients navigate that process. Through the pandemic, we’ve had more and more issues with medication shortages in general. We’ve been able to find pivots along the way.”

Another tip Bauman shares is to check your albuterol stockpile at home.

“Make sure those medications are up to date. Usually for the nebulizer solution and the rescue inhalers, most of those will expire after a year,” Bauman says. “They’ve found with research that most of those medications aren’t harmful to use after their expiration date, but they probably won’t be as effective.”

Now that spring has arrived, allergy season has come along with it. Bauman offers to advice on how to breathe easier in the coming months.

“Limit that outside exposure if you know pollen is affecting you. Especially in the midday hours when we find that pollen tends to increase as the day goes on,” Bauman says. “Try to keep pets away from your bedroom and sleeping on your bed. Pets will bring pollen in, we don’t want that to be around as people are sleeping. Try to limit the windows being open, especially in the bedroom at night.”

Bauman also says air purifiers are a great help to make sure the air is safe to breathe inside your home.

There are other conditions that can affect someone’s breathing, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

While Bauman says the two conditions share a lot of the same symptoms, there are some key differences.

“Both have similar symptoms of shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing chest tightness,” Bauman says. “The main differences are with asthma, there’s some airway remodeling. The airways tend to get very inflamed and constrict. That’s usually either due to either genetics and/or environmental triggers patients experience.”

She adds while the airway obstruction can be partially reversible, that’s not the case with COPD.

“COPD is a group of lung diseases that most people will know either as emphysema or chronic bronchitis,” she says. “Those are progressive type diseases, in which the airway obstruction is usually irreversible. Most commonly, we see COPD because of people who have smoked long term.”

If you are dealing with asthma or COPD symptoms, OR other breathing difficulties, you can get help through lung & pulmonology services offered by OSF HealthCare.