

## Climate Change and Inhalers

'You are the God who gives breath to all creatures.'

*Numbers 16:22b*

Climate change impacts everyone's health and in particular patients with respiratory disease. You may be surprised to learn that inhalers are responsible for around 3% of NHS carbon emissions. However, the most important thing you can do for your health and for the planet is to get your disease control as good as it can be.

### Which inhaler devices are environmentally friendly?

Metered dose inhalers (MDIs), sometimes called 'pumps' or 'puffers', are less environmentally friendly. They contain a gas (propellant) that is a powerful greenhouse gas which adds to global warming. They produce an estimated 10 – 37kg CO<sub>2</sub>e per device per month depending on the type of inhaler.

Dry powder inhalers (DPIs) or soft mist inhalers (SMIs) do not contain greenhouse gases and so have a lower carbon footprint, producing less than 1kg CO<sub>2</sub>e per device per month. They are much more environmentally friendly.

### What should I do if I need to use an inhaler and I am concerned about the environment?

Do not stop using any of your prescribed

medications including inhalers because you are worried about your carbon footprint, and do not feel guilty if your clinician advises you to continue using your Metered Dose Inhaler because alternatives are not necessarily recommended for all patients.

It is really important to keep taking the medicines that you need, particularly your regular maintenance or preventer inhaler which can help prevent exacerbations and reduce the need for rescue treatments.

If you stop your treatment, your condition might get out of control, which can be dangerous for your health. It will also have a higher carbon footprint because if, for example, you have asthma you will need to use your reliever (rescue) inhaler more, and may need more visits to your GP or hospital.

There are steps you can take to reduce your carbon footprint:

- Take your prescribed medicines as instructed and talk to your community pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns.
- Ensure you know how to use your inhaler properly and do so all the time. Remember that the greenest inhaler is

one which you can use properly. If you are not sure, ask your community pharmacist. Training videos for different types of inhalers can be found here:

<https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/living-with/inhaler-videos>

- Use your inhaler until empty and know how to tell when your inhaler is empty.
- Only order the medicines which you need. You don't need to order your inhalers (or other medicines) every month. If you have enough stock. 'Open the bag' of prescription items before you leave the pharmacy and hand back any unwanted items. You can order the following month if needed then.
- Do not throw any inhalers away or put them in your home recycling, because they cannot be recycled that way. Return your empty or no longer needed inhalers (and other medicines) to a community pharmacy or dispensary for environmentally friendly disposal.
- Attend your annual medication review with your clinician. Use this as the opportunity to discuss whether an inhaler with a lower carbon footprint may be suitable for you.
- Keeping physically active and stopping smoking are also really important ways

to improve your lung health without relying on medicines.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has produced a decision aid about [Asthma Inhalers and Climate Change](#), which provides more information.

*Paula Hiatt*

*To find out more or to share your ideas on Eco Church please go to the website [www.allsaintsspringfield.org.uk/church-life/eco-church](http://www.allsaintsspringfield.org.uk/church-life/eco-church) or speak to one of the Eco Church Group – Roger McFarland, Nicky Morecroft, Chris McFarland, Ian Poston, Dave Gauld, Beth Cornish, Ann Salmon.*



## **This month's eco suggestions**

- How can we **improve our environmental footprint?** Find out at [footprint.wwf.org.uk](http://footprint.wwf.org.uk) or at [climate-calculator.climatehero.me](http://climate-calculator.climatehero.me)
- Use **re-fillable water bottles and coffee cups** instead of buying plastic bottles or disposable cups