

Using Asthma Inhalers, But Correctly

By BARRY MEIER In the wake of a new study that found that the overuse of asthma drugs might be hazardous, physicians are urging patients not to stop using them but to use them correctly.

The Canadian study, sponsored by Boehringer Ingelheim, a German drug company that makes the drugs, called beta-2 agonists, found that excessive use increased risks of a fatal asthma attack. But the study said more research is needed to determine if the drug, sold in inhalers, causes the attacks. Four such inhalers are sold in the United States: albuterol, called Ventolin, made by Glaxo Holdings and Proventil, made by Schering-Plough; terbutaline, called Brethaire, made by Ciba-Geigy, and metaproterenol, called Alupent, also made by Boehringer. In Canada, Boehringer makes fenoterol, a double-strength drug sold as Berotec. The recommended daily dosage of a beta-2 agonist is two puffs two to four times a day. Bad asthma sufferers may want to use more but should consult doctors if doing so. Dr. Albert Sheffer, an asthma consultant to the National Institutes of Health, urged those who use the drugs daily to discuss the use of anti-inflammatory drugs with their doctors. He urged asthma sufferers not to stop using the inhalers if they wheeze or have trouble breathing. Correction: August 15, 1991, Thursday A drawing on the Consumer's World page on Saturday with an article about inhalers for asthma patients showed use of an inhaler incorrectly. It should be held with the canister above the mouthpiece.