Steroids—not all are created equal

When you have asthma, you have it all the time. With asthma, inflammation (irritation and swelling) is one of the things that happens in the airways of your lungs. When you have a flare-up, the airways become more swollen and fill with mucus.

You can help control these flare-ups and have fewer asthma symptoms by taking an anti-inflammatory medicine called a corticosteroid (or “steroid”) every day, or as prescribed by your doctor.

The anti-inflammatory steroids used to treat asthma come two ways—inhaled (breathed in through the mouth directly into the lungs) and oral (taken as a pill or liquid). They help decrease the swelling in the airways.

**Inhaled corticosteroids (ICS)**

ICS are commonly used to treat asthma. They are used every day to help decrease inflammation and swelling in the airways. They also help decrease asthma symptoms like wheezing and cough.

Because ICS go to the lungs, there is less risk of the side effects that may occur with oral corticosteroids.

**Oral corticosteroids**

Oral corticosteroids are used to treat severe asthma flare-ups. They act to quickly decrease the inflammation and help you feel better fast. They also decrease the chance of a flare-up happening again so soon. Oral corticosteroids may also be used to treat severe asthma.

The steroids used to treat asthma are **NOT** the same as the steroids some athletes take to build muscles. The steroids sometimes abused by athletes are called anabolic steroids.

**Anabolic steroids**

Anabolic steroids are **NOT** the same as corticosteroids. Anabolic steroids are a different type of steroid used to treat some illnesses. They have also been used by some athletes to build bigger and stronger muscles. It is unsafe to use anabolic steroids in this way. **Remember:** Anabolic steroids are **NOT** used to treat asthma.