



# Health Awareness

## Asthma Q & A With Jackie Joyner-Kersey And A Specialist Pharmacist

(NAPSA)—Many of the 22 million Americans who suffer from asthma do not have the condition under control. Gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey is a good example of someone who needed some help to successfully control the condition.

In fact, it took several life-threatening attacks and multiple trips to the emergency room before Jackie started taking a proactive approach to asthma management. Now, Jackie avoids attack triggers and takes medication to keep her asthma under control.



**Ron Erkens,**  
R.Ph.

Jackie works with her doctor and a specialist pharmacist. Just like doctors, some pharmacists are now specializing in chronic health conditions. Jackie relies on pulmonary pharmacists like Ron Erkens as an educational resource and to help her manage her medications. Ron has in-depth knowledge about pulmonary conditions, including asthma, and the medications used to treat them.

Through Medco Health Solutions, Inc., Jackie and millions of other Americans now have access to specialist pharmacists who concentrate solely on chronic conditions like asthma. Following is a conversation between Jackie and Ron on how to effectively manage her asthma.

**Jackie: There seem to be a lot of medicines for asthma. What are some of the most common asthma medications?**

**Ron:** People with asthma, chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other breathing conditions often use the following two different types of medications to help control their condition:

- **Long-term control medications** (controllers) work to help reduce inflammation or relax muscles in the airways. They must be taken daily to prevent symptoms. They will not give quick relief if breathing suddenly worsens.

- **Quick-relief medications** (relievers) relax airway muscles to provide rapid relief of symptoms.



**Jackie Joyner-Kersey controls her asthma by avoiding attack triggers and taking medication.**

They can be taken as needed or when symptoms worsen but will not control symptoms on a daily basis. Using more than one reliever inhaler per month indicates your breathing condition is not under control or you may not be using your inhaler correctly. Taking your medications correctly can lower your risk of doctor and emergency room visits, hospitalizations and death.

**Jackie: Many people have more than one chronic condition, and are thus taking multiple medications. Are there any problems that can arise?**

**Ron:** Yes, certain medications can have harmful interactions when taken together. This is why it's important to read labels on all medications, even OTC medications. If you're still unsure, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Some medications used to treat asthma should be used with caution in patients with cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, glaucoma and with certain food allergies. This is why it's important to tell your doctor your complete medical history, so the proper medication is prescribed without harmful side effects.

**Jackie: What are the benefits of pulmonary specialist pharmacists?**

**Ron:** We review National Asthma Education and Prevention Program (NAEPP) Guideline recommendations for the treatment of asthma. In addition, when there is a safety issue, we review patient medication profiles, check safety of

medications with medical conditions, look for duplication of medications, and seek other opportunities that can help improve patient outcomes, as well as offer some possible lower-cost options.

**Jackie: Why do so many people with asthma end up in the emergency room?**

**Ron:** Patients often stop or decrease their medications when they feel good. People need to take controller medications daily to prevent flare-ups later. Sometimes people overuse their rescue medications, which might be a sign of worsening or uncontrolled asthma. Knowing more about asthma and turning to health professionals like specialist pharmacists to help take medications correctly is key.

**Jackie: What if someone can't afford asthma medication?**

**Ron:** Talking to your doctor and pharmacist about generics may offer cost savings. If you are taking a long-term medication, check with your pharmacy plan for any potential savings you can receive by filling your medications through mail. Check for any discount programs that might be available. For example, Medco has currently waived the annual fee for the Medco Rx Discount Program, which, while not an insurance program, still provides enrollees an opportunity to save an average of 14 to 45 percent off prescription medications and receive advanced pharmacy care from specialist pharmacists. You can sign up and learn more at [www.medcospecialists.com](http://www.medcospecialists.com).

**Jackie: What advice do you have for people with asthma?**

**Ron:** Although asthma is not curable, most patients who follow doctors' recommended treatment can live normal, active lives. Asthma is one of the nation's most-common and costly chronic conditions, accounting for more than 2 million emergency room visits each year, 10 million lost workdays, about 13 million lost school days and 4,000 deaths per year.

By working closely with her doctor and pulmonary pharmacist, Jackie is a perfect example of someone controlling asthma.