

## Your Health MEDICAL MAILBOX

### SPECIAL REPORT

## Allergy Alert

Millions of Americans who use inhalers or auto-injectors for severe asthma and allergies need a refresher course on correct use of the potentially lifesaving devices, according to new research. A recent study by the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston shows only 16 percent of people using epinephrine shots for a severe allergic reaction (and just 7 percent of those with metered-dose inhalers for asthma) used the device in the right way. “Our study suggests that either people weren’t properly trained,



didn’t completely understand the instructions, or forgot the instructions over time,” said Dr. Rana Bonds, an allergist and lead author of the study. Here’s how to correct the top two mistakes: When using an inhaler, exhale prior to delivering the puff of medication. For epinephrine users, hold the unit in place for at least 10 seconds after triggering.

### HEALTH TREND

## RX ARTHRITIS PILLS: ARE THEY SAFE?

Many people with arthritis swore by Celebrex, Vioxx, and similar long-lasting prescription NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) in the late 1990s through early 2000s. Then came a big pullback when research linked these pills to heart attacks and strokes. Vioxx was pulled from the market because of its greater risk. But many swore off Celebrex, too. Now Celebrex is regaining popularity and so is Mobic. We asked Kate Lapane, Ph.D, an epidemiologist at University of Massachusetts, and rheumatologist Dr. Allan Gibofsky at Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, what people need to know before starting.

**1. Risk is relative.** All NSAIDs, whether prescription or over-the-counter, carry some risk, but the dangers for any individual have to do with your current heart health. “We are now more attuned to NSAID risk and can better balance it with the risk of under-treating joint pain,” Gibofsky says.

**2. Dosage is a key factor.** When nonprescription NSAIDs such as ibuprofen, naproxen and aspirin are no longer working, or when you find yourself taking them at higher than recommended doses, it may be time to switch to a prescription.

**3. It’s a team effort.** When you take NSAIDs in prescription form, there’s the benefit of having expert supervision. “Taking them under a physician’s care is safer than self-treating pain from a progressive condition,” Gibofsky says.

**4. We know more today than we did then.** Many ask: How do unsafe drugs get on the market? “Drug studies are designed to prove efficacy, and are often not able to detect safety issues,” Lapane explains. “These studies are not large enough to detect side effects – that takes hundreds of thousands of people and sometimes years of follow-up.” She says NSAIDs on the market today have stood the test of time, but it bears repeating that none are risk free.

### 5-MINUTE FITNESS Trim and Tone with Hand Weights

“Performing leg squats with light weights juxtaposes toning and cardio, producing a sculpting and calorie-blasting effect that targets hamstrings, quads, and butt while chiseling arms and shoulders to perfection,” says New York board-certified nutritionist and personal trainer Franci Cohen. She recommends this exercise to jumpstart your day.

#### Power Squats

**1** Stand with feet together. Hold a 1-pound weight (or a 16-ounce can from your pantry) in each hand.

**2** Open stance so feet are a bit wider than hip width apart. Lower into squat position with knees over toes and weight shifted toward rear.

**3** Squat low enough to place weights on floor.

**4** Leaving weights on floor, rise up, jumping at the top of the motion. As you jump, reach hands over head toward ceiling.

**5** Lower hands and squat down again (step 2).

**6** Pick up weights, rise and jump up, raising weights toward ceiling.

**Repetitions:** Gradually work up to 30 reps of steps 1-6.

**Modifications:** For more difficulty, add more weight. For less, simply squat down and up while lowering and lifting weights. (Don’t jump.)

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