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2. Theophylline

Theophylline

Generic name: theophylline (oral) [*thee-OFF-i-lin*]

Brand names: [Elixophyllin](#), [Theo-24](#), Respbid, T-Phyl, Aerolate III, ... [show all 34 brands](#)

Dosage forms: oral capsule, extended release (100 mg/24 hours; 200 mg/24 hours; 300 mg/24 hours; 400 mg/24 hours), ... [show all 4 dosage forms](#)

Drug class: [Methylxanthines](#)



[Medically reviewed](#) by Drugs.com on Aug 4, 2023. Written by [Cerner Multum](#).

[Uses](#) [Side effects](#) [Warnings](#) [Before taking](#) [Dosage](#) [Interactions](#)

What is theophylline?

Theophylline is a bronchodilator that is used to treat symptoms of asthma, [bronchitis](#), [emphysema](#), and other breathing problems.

Theophylline may also be used for purposes not listed in this medication guide.

Theophylline side effects

Get emergency medical help if you have **signs of an allergic reaction**: hives; difficult breathing; swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat.

Theophylline may cause serious side effects. Call your doctor at once if you have:

- severe or continued [vomiting](#);
- ongoing [headache](#), trouble sleeping;
- rapid heartbeats;
- a seizure;
- new signs of illness (especially fever);
- **low potassium level**--leg cramps, [constipation](#), irregular heartbeats, fluttering in your chest, increased thirst or urination, numbness or tingling, muscle weakness or limp feeling; or
- **high blood sugar**--increased thirst, increased urination, [dry mouth](#), fruity breath odor.

Serious side effects may be more likely in older adults.

Common side effects of theophylline may include:

- nausea, vomiting, [diarrhea](#);

- headache;
- sleep problems ([insomnia](#));
- tremors;
- sweating; or
- feeling restless or irritable.

This is not a complete list of side effects and others may occur. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

 [Theophylline side effects](#) (more detail)

Related/similar drugs

Xolair

Xolair injection (omalizumab) is used to reduce the risk of severe food allergy reactions ...

Reviews & ratings

7.5 / 10

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Symbicort

Symbicort (budesonide and formoterol) is used to prevent bronchospasm in people with asthma or ...

Reviews & ratings

6.6 / 10

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Ventolin HFA (albuterol) is used to treat or prevent breathing problems in patients who have asthma ...

Reviews & ratings

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Breo Ellipta

Breo Ellipta (fluticasone and vilanterol) is used to prevent airflow obstruction or bronchospasm in ...

Reviews & ratings

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Spiriva

Spiriva (tiotropium) is used to prevent bronchospasm in people with bronchitis, emphysema, or COPD ...

Reviews & ratings

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Xopenex

Xopenex is a short-acting bronchodilator used to treat or prevent bronchospasm in asthma and other ...

Reviews & ratings

9.0 / 10

[15 Reviews](#)

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Warnings

Never use theophylline in larger amounts, or for longer than prescribed. Seek medical attention if your breathing problems get worse quickly, or if you think your medications are not working as well.

Overdose can occur if you take too much theophylline at one time, or if your daily doses are too high.

Tell your doctor about all your current medicines and any you start or stop using. **Many drugs can interact with theophylline.**

Before taking this medicine

You should not use theophylline if you are allergic to it.

Tell your doctor if you have ever had:

- a gastric or [peptic ulcer](#);
- a serious [infection](#) called sepsis;
- [liver disease](#) (especially [cirrhosis](#) or hepatitis);
- fluid in your lungs;
- heart problems;
- a thyroid disorder;
- [seizures](#); or
- kidney disease.

Tell your doctor if you drink alcohol, or if you smoke or have recently quit smoking cigarettes or marijuana.

Also tell your doctor if you have been sick with a high fever (102 degrees or higher) for 24 hours or longer.

Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Do not give theophylline to a child without medical advice.

How should I take theophylline?

Follow all directions on your prescription label and read all medication guides or instruction sheets. Your doctor may occasionally change your dose. **Never use theophylline in larger amounts, or for longer than prescribed.**

Theophylline is not a rescue medicine for asthma or bronchospasm attacks. Use only fast-acting inhalation medicine for an attack. Seek medical attention if your breathing problems get worse quickly, or if you think your medications are not working as well.

Swallow the **capsule or tablet** whole and do not crush or chew it. You may break a scored tablet in half if needed to get the correct dose.

Some tablets are made with a shell that is not absorbed or melted in the body. Part of this shell may appear in your stool.

This is normal and will not make the medicine less effective.

Measure **liquid medicine** carefully. Use the dosing syringe provided, or use a medicine dose-measuring device (not a kitchen spoon).

Your dose and the number of times you take theophylline daily will depend on the reason you are taking this medication.

Follow your doctor's instructions about whether to take your medication with food or on an empty stomach.

Your dose needs may change if you are ill, or if you switch to a different brand, strength, or form of this medicine. **Avoid medication errors by using only the form and strength your doctor prescribes.**

You will need regular medical tests to be sure you are using the right dose. **Do not change your dose or dosing schedule without your doctor's advice.**

Theophylline doses are based on weight in children. Your child's dose needs may change if the child gains or loses weight.

This medicine can affect the results of certain medical tests. Tell any doctor who treats you that you are using theophylline.

Store at room temperature away from moisture, heat, and light.

 [Detailed Theophylline dosage information](#)

What happens if I miss a dose?

Skip the missed dose and use your next dose at the regular time. **Do not** use two doses at one time.

What happens if I overdose?

Seek emergency medical attention or call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222. **Seizures caused by a theophylline overdose can cause death or permanent brain damage.**

Theophylline overdose can occur if you accidentally take too much at one time. Overdose can also occur slowly over time if your daily doses are too high. **To be sure you are using the correct dose, your blood will need to be tested often.**

Overdose symptoms may include severe nausea and vomiting, seizure, [slow heart rate](#), weak pulse, or [fainting](#).

What should I avoid while using theophylline?

Do not start or stop smoking without first talking to your doctor. Smoking changes the way your body uses theophylline, and you may need to use a different dose.

Avoid taking an herbal supplement containing [St. John's wort](#).

Avoid driving or hazardous activity until you know how theophylline will affect you. Your reactions could be impaired.

What other drugs will affect theophylline?

Sometimes it is not safe to use certain medications at the same time. Some drugs can affect your blood levels of other drugs you take, which may increase side effects or make the medications less effective.

If you take St. John's wort regularly, do not stop taking it without first asking your doctor. Starting or stopping St. John's wort can affect your blood levels of theophylline.

Many drugs can affect theophylline. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines, [vitamins](#), and [herbal products](#). **Not all possible interactions are listed here.** Tell your doctor about all your current medicines and any medicine you start or stop using.

 [Theophylline drug interactions](#) (more detail)

Does theophylline interact with my other drugs?

Enter medications to view a detailed interaction report using our [Drug Interaction Checker](#).

+

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Patient resources

- [Theophylline \(Intravenous\) advanced reading](#)
- [Theophylline \(Oral\) \(Advanced Reading\)](#)
- [Theophylline Extended-Release Tablets](#)

- [Theophylline Extended-Release Capsules](#)
- [Theophylline Injection](#)

Other brands

[Theo-Dur](#), [Theo-24](#), [Elixophyllin](#), [Quibron-T](#), ... +6 more

Professional resources

- [Theophylline prescribing information](#)
- [Theophylline Elixir \(FDA\)](#)
- [Theophylline Oral Solution \(FDA\)](#)
- [Theophylline in Dextrose \(FDA\)](#)

Other brands

[Theo-24](#), [Elixophyllin](#), [Quibron-T/SR](#)

Related treatment guides

- [Asthma, acute](#)
- [Asthma, Maintenance](#)
- [Apnea of Prematurity](#)
- [Asthma](#)

Further information

Remember, keep this and all other medicines out of the reach of children, never share your medicines with others, and use this medication only for the indication prescribed.


Always consult your healthcare provider to ensure the information displayed on this page applies to your personal circumstances.

[Medical Disclaimer](#)

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DRUG STATUS

Availability
Rx Prescription only

Pregnancy & Lactation
 Risk data available

CSA Schedule*
N/A Not a controlled drug

Approval History



User Reviews & Ratings

7.8 / 10

[17 Reviews](#)

Images

[Theophylline Extended-Release 100 mg \(PLIVA 483\)](#)



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