

Action Steps

Make a plan to be active and exercise regularly

Talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program to be sure you are healthy and your exercise plan is right for you

Do a gradual warm-up before exercise and a cool-down after exercising

Ask about the use of asthma medicines to help prevent breathing problems while exercising

Check the environment for asthma triggers before exercising

If you smoke, talk to your health care provide about how to quit and set a quit date

Make a note of your healthcare provider's contact number:

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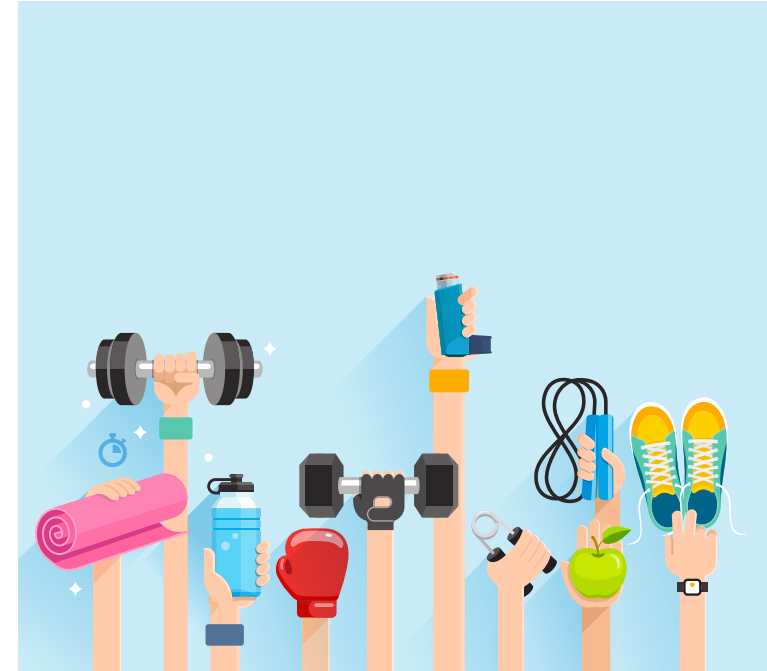
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<https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/asthma-and-exercise.pdf>

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Asthma and Physical Exercise

Allergy and Immunology Awareness Program



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Asthma and Physical Exercise

Physical Exercise is for EVERYONE

Physical exercise is good for you and regular exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle. Although exercise may trigger asthma symptoms, it does not make your asthma worse. While it is better to try to avoid asthma triggers, it does not mean you should avoid physical exercise altogether. When asthma is well controlled, you should not be limited in physical activity. Your healthcare provider can help you make an exercise plan that will allow you to feel more fit and take part in normal activities and exercise.

What is Exercise-induced Asthma?

People who have poorly controlled asthma often have symptoms with exercise. Some people may have asthma symptoms that are only brought on by exercise. This form of asthma is called exercise-induced asthma (or EIA).

Common symptoms of asthma that can occur with exercise are coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest pain or tightness, tiredness, and difficulty keeping up with others.

Asthma symptoms can occur during vigorous activity but usually start 5–10 minutes after stopping the activity. Sometimes these symptoms can return hours later. Whether exercise brings on asthma symptoms may depend on how long you are active, the intensity of the activity, and the environment where you exercise. Very intense sports, such as swimming, soccer and long-distance running, are most likely to cause asthma symptoms but do not always need to be avoided since the symptoms can usually be controlled.

Asthma symptoms may occur with exposure to triggers in the environment where exercise is taking place. For example, a person may breathe comfortably indoors on a basketball court but will have asthma symptoms when running in a grassy field or ice-skating in cold weather. Triggers that can be a problem include outside temperature, humidity, air pollution, pollen or molds in the air, and chemical fumes, including those found at some ice rinks and pools. The triggers that affect you may be different from triggers that affect someone else.

How to Prevent Asthma Problems with Physical Exercise

To stay active with asthma, or to become more active, the following steps can help:

1. Identify your exercise-induced asthma triggers,
2. Take your pre-treatment asthma medicine,
3. Warm-up before exercise and end the activity with a cool-down exercise.

Identify your exercise-induced asthma triggers

- If cold air triggers your asthma, you can try wearing a scarf or cold weather mask over your nose and mouth to warm the air. Try to breathe through your nose when exercising.
- If you have allergies to any molds or pollens, check mold or pollen counts and avoid outdoor activity when the counts are very high.

Usually, air pollution levels are highest during midday or afternoon. Ozone is a common outdoor air pollutant in the summer months. When the levels are high, you should avoid outdoor activities.

Pre-treatment Asthma Medicines

Several kinds of medication can be taken before exercise to prevent asthma symptoms, including bronchodilator and anti-inflammatory medicines.

Bronchodilators (medicines that open your airways by relaxing the muscles around your breathing tubes). There are two types of bronchodilators, short-acting or long-acting. Both types are used to prevent asthma symptoms.

Short-acting bronchodilators include albuterol and levalbuterol. You should take your short-acting bronchodilator 15–30 minutes before starting to exercise. It will not last longer than 2–4 hours. Even if you take your short-acting bronchodilator before you exercise, you can use it again as a “reliever medicine” if you have symptoms during or after exercise.

Anti-inflammatory medicines (medicines used to prevent swelling in your breathing tubes). These include both corticosteroid (such as beclomethasone, budesonide, flunisolide, fluticasone, mometasone, triamcinalone) and

non-steroid medicines (such as montelukast and zafirlukast). Anti-inflammatory medicines are usually taken on a regular schedule to control your asthma. They are called “controller medicines”.

You may not notice any immediate improvement when you use these medicines as they can take time to work. If you have regular asthma symptoms, (more than twice a week during the day or twice a month at night) should talk to your health care provider about using a controller medicine.

Why is it Important to do Warm-up and Cool-down Exercises?

Spending 5 to 10 minutes warming-up before exercising can help to prevent asthma symptoms during the activity. A simple warm-up exercise can be to begin walking slowly and increase your speed. You could also do jumping jack exercises, starting with moving your arms only, and then add your legs. Slowly cooling down for 5 to 10 minutes after exercising can help prevent asthma symptoms that might start after exercising. Your cool down activity can be walking or stretching.

What to do if symptoms occur with exercise

Even if you use your bronchodilator medicine before exercise, asthma symptoms can occur during exercise. If they do occur, you should slow down. If symptoms continue to get worse, you may need to use your quick-relief medicine like albuterol. Even if you took this medicine before exercising, it is OK to take it again to relieve your symptoms. If you feel your breathing is limiting your ability to exercise, tell your healthcare provider.

Getting Fit

If you are overweight or have not been getting regular exercise you may be out of shape or in poor physical condition. Poor conditioning can make a person feel out of breath and this might be confused with asthma symptoms. Lack of physical fitness makes exercise seem harder and a person may feel out of breath sooner. It takes time and effort to build physical fitness and get in good shape. Make a plan to improve your fitness condition gradually.