

# Exercise-Induced Asthma

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**Exercise-induced asthma:** Acute lung airway narrowing that occurs during and/or after physical activity. The cause is unknown but may be due to airway temperature, dry air, and bronchial artery congestion.



The diagnosis is generally made by the patient's history but can be confirmed by an exercise spirometry test. Symptoms of wheezing and breathlessness usually peak within 10 minutes of exercise cessation and respond spontaneously within 20 - 60 minutes, depending on the severity of the attack.

The treatment of choice is an inhaled beta<sup>2</sup> agonist (albuterol) 15 minutes before exercise. Preventative medications might include: Tilade, Cromolyn, leukotriene receptor antagonists, or inhaled corticosteroids.

The goal of treatment is to allow you to participate in activities without experiencing asthma symptoms. Discuss with your health care provider the appropriate time to take your medication. Listed below are some key points to a winning combination of exercise and asthma.

- Try a variety of activities and pick one you enjoy.
- Start with moderate activities: walking, swimming, biking, or low impact aerobics.
- Exercising with a partner or group can keep you motivated and provide a safety factor not available when exercising alone.
- Select an environment that will help you avoid triggering asthma (i.e. running outdoors when the pollen count is high).

- Swimming or water sports may be good due to moist environment.
- Warm-ups are essential, gradual 5-10 minute's prior to exercise.
- If out in the cold, wear a mask or scarf to keep cold air from irritating the airways.
- Consider pollen counts and smog levels for example when exercising outdoors.
- Short burst of activity followed by short rest periods are sometimes better than long period of heavy exertion.
- Slowly work into your program, or you risk the chance of triggering asthma.
- Be flexible with your schedule. Don't push yourself if you are having a flare up. Take care of yourself and resume exercise when you are well.
- Judge the intensity of your exercise by using the "talk test" -- If you can carry on a conversation while exercising, then you are not exercising too hard. Slow down if you feel dizzy or faint. If you have to stop exercising suddenly, find a place to sit or recline in a comfortable position until your breathing has returned to normal.



References: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. (June 1992) [International consensus report on diagnosis and treatment of asthma](#) (Publication No 92-3091) National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD: Author.

The AIR/Kaiser Adult Asthma Program, developed by the American Institutes for Research and the Kaiser-Permanente Medical Care Program. (March 1992).

