



Healthy Living with Mild to Moderate Asthma

Asthma doesn't have to take the fun out of your life. If your asthma is properly managed, you can enjoy a happy, healthy and active lifestyle. This fact sheet will provide you with tips about living healthy with asthma: being tobacco free, nutrition, exercise and traveling.

Smoking Tobacco and Asthma

Smoking is harmful to anyone's health. But when you have asthma, there is an extra risk to your lung's health if you smoke or are exposed to second-hand smoke. This is because your airways are more sensitive to other irritants and allergens when you breathe in smoke.

There are two ways the airways become more sensitive.

- Tobacco smoke irritates the airways. Irritation causes the lung to become more inflamed (swollen) and sensitive. This can cause more asthma symptoms, make your asthma more difficult to control and you may likely get more colds and flus.

- Tobacco smoke lowers the effect of inhaled corticosteroids. This type of medication is used to decrease the sensitivity of the lungs.

People who smoke may need stronger medications or need to take more medication to control their asthma. They may have more flare-ups of their symptoms. They are more likely to get chest colds, the flu and pneumonia.

There are a couple of things you can do to help your lungs and keep your asthma in control. The first is to make your home and vehicle smoke free. Stay away from indoor places where people smoke whenever possible.

If you smoke, the best thing you can do for your lungs is to quit.

To quit smoking, check out the Canadian Lung Association's information on quitting at www.lung.ca.



Nutrition and Asthma

Although there is no specific diet linked to improving/worsening asthma, eating a balanced diet of fresh, whole foods is beneficial for your overall health.

Some research showed that a healthy diet rich in fruit, fiber, and vegetables is associated with reduced asthma symptoms and greater asthma control. In addition, studies have shown that certain foods can help support lung function, particularly those rich in Vitamin A, Vitamin D, and Magnesium.

However, there are some foods to be aware of. There is some evidence that food containing sulfites (found in foods like dried fruits, wine, beer and processed potatoes) can make your asthma worse. If you have a specific food allergy, it could also interfere with your asthma.

Therefore, it is advised to steer clear of any foods you are allergic to.

If you would like to learn more about balanced diet, make an appointment with a registered dietitian. Remember to speak with your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns.



Exercising with Asthma

Although exercising can be a trigger if your asthma is not under control, you should NOT avoid exercising.

Exercise is important for your overall health as it boosts your immune system, strengthens muscles (including breathing muscles) and helps to maintain a healthy heart and weight.

TO EXERCISE SAFELY:

- Make sure your asthma is under control first. Do not exercise if you are having more asthma symptoms than usual. Let your healthcare provider know if you have asthma symptoms with exercise and need your reliever (rescue) inhaler more than twice a week for exercise. Having symptoms during exercise more than twice a week could be a sign you need more controller medication.
- Exercise when you are well. Avoid exercise if you have a cold, flu, or other viral illness.
- Avoid exercising outside if you have pollen allergies and the pollen count is high.
- Be aware of your triggers. Avoid exercising in extreme temperatures (hot or cold) if they trigger your asthma symptoms.
- Pay attention to the air quality. There is a direct link between air quality and asthma symptoms. Check the Air Quality Health Index for your local area if you plan to exercise outdoors.
- Warm up for at least 15 minutes at half your maximum intensity and cool down for 15 minutes at the end of the exercise.
- Stay hydrated before, during, and after exercise.
- Ensure you have taken your asthma medication as prescribed.
- Always carry your rescue/reliever inhaler with you when exercise.
- Check your Asthma Action Plan or our Asthma Medications fact sheet if you have any questions.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU EXPERIENCE ASTHMA SYMPTOMS WHEN EXERCISING:

1. If you begin to have asthma symptoms when exercising, stop immediately and use your reliever (rescue) inhaler.
2. Wait to see if your symptoms improve.
3. If your symptoms fully resolve, you can slowly warm up and begin exercising again.
4. If they do not improve, take another dose of your rescue inhaler.
5. Wait a few minutes to see if your symptoms improve.
6. If you are still experiencing asthma symptoms, and they are not improving with the use of your rescue inhaler, then call 911. Keep taking your blue rescue inhaler every few minutes until medical assistance arrives.

It is important to keep an active lifestyle. Exercise provides many health benefits, including maintaining or improving your lung function and symptoms. By being aware of your triggers and your health, you can exercise safely and effectively with asthma.

There are no specific types of sports or exercises that you have to avoid. However, if you have any concerns about exercising with asthma or find that you regularly experience symptoms when exercising, consult your healthcare team for advice.



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Traveling with Asthma

There is no reason asthma should prevent your traveling and exploring. Whether you are traveling in your home country or venturing abroad make sure you are aware of environmental changes and possible triggers.

TOP TIPS FOR TRAVELING SAFELY WITH ASTHMA:

- Ensure you keep your asthma medication close to you in your pocket, purse or hand luggage.
- Travel with extra asthma medication in case you run out and are not able to refill your medication.
- Pack all respiratory equipment you regularly use, such as spacers, peak flow meters and nebulizers. Ensure you have appropriate adapters for anything electronic.
- Check your health insurance coverage before traveling.
- Check weather, air quality and pollen count before engaging in outdoor activities.
- Always carry your reliever (rescue) inhaler with you.
- Ensure your accommodations are trigger-free (example, feather-free pillows, pet free, smoke-free, vape-free etc.)

Live a Healthy Life

If you find that your asthma is not under control, or is getting you down, then speak to your healthcare team. To speak to a Certified Respiratory Educator, call The Lung Association's Lung Help Line 1-888-566-LUNG (5864) or email info@lung.ca. There are many ways they can help you to control your asthma, reduce your symptoms and get back to doing the things you enjoy.

Eating a healthy diet, enjoying regular exercise, avoiding triggers and quitting smoking and/or avoiding second-hand smoke all help control your asthma and improve your overall health.

Asthma is manageable. By keeping your asthma under control, taking your asthma medication, and knowing your triggers, you can live a normal, full, and active life.

To learn more about triggers, read our fact sheet on Asthma Control and Management.

References:

- European Respiratory Journal, Associations between dietary scores with asthma symptoms and asthma control in adults, <https://erj.ersjournals.com/content/52/1/1702572>,
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