

SECTION 7: ASTHMA AND EXERCISE

THE ASTHMA HANDBOOK



If you have asthma, you can still exercise regularly. As long as your asthma is under control, exercising is recommended to keep your lungs and body in good shape. Before starting a new exercise program, discuss it with your health-care team since changes in your medications may be needed.

Exercise does not cause asthma. However, exercise can be a trigger for people with asthma (known as exercised-induced bronchospasm).

Why does exercise sometimes trigger asthma symptoms?

Normally, people breathe through their noses. The nose acts as an air filter. It controls the temperature and humidity of the air before it reaches the lungs. When you exercise, your body needs more air and you breathe faster. You start breathing through your mouth. Air that comes through your mouth has not been filtered, warmed, or moistened by your nose. This means the air that gets to your airways is cooler and drier than usual.

If you have asthma, your extra-sensitive airways react to the cool, dry air. The muscles around the airways twitch and squeeze tighter. Tighter airways mean there is less space for the air to pass through. This makes you wheeze, cough and feel short of breath.

TIPS FOR EXERCISING

- Talk to your doctor about using your rescue medication (blue puffer) 15-20 minutes before exercising.
- Warm up slowly before exercising by walking.
- Cool down slowly for at least 10 minutes after exercising. Don't stop suddenly.
- Avoid exercising outside on days when pollution or pollen counts are high. Exercise indoors instead.
- Cover your nose and mouth when exercising outdoors in cold weather with a scarf or a special asthma mask. You may want to exercise indoors.
- Always carry your blue puffer with you.
- If you are running, biking or cross-country skiing alone, tell someone where you will be going and when to expect you back.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE ASTHMA SYMPTOMS WHILE EXERCISING

1. Stop exercising immediately.
2. Take your blue puffer.
3. Relax in a resting position (sitting up or standing against a wall) and wait a few minutes to see if your symptoms get better.
4. If your symptoms really improve, warm up again and slowly start exercising.
5. If your symptoms aren't getting any better, call for help and keep using your blue puffer until help arrives.
6. If you are very short of breath, call 911.