

How to Exercise Safely with Asthma



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Asthma is a chronic, inflammatory disease that affects the lungs, causing airways to narrow and swell, making breathing difficult. Asthma symptoms may include repeated episodes of wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and nighttime or early morning coughing. If asthma is not well controlled, it can be life threatening. There is no cure, but understanding asthma triggers and following an action plan can help with the management of symptoms.¹

Exercise is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. While exercise may be a trigger for asthma symptoms, with proper planning and care, it can be possible to have a safe exercise routine.

Plan

Take precautions before starting exercise:

- **Talk to your healthcare provider before starting any new exercise or activity**
- Create an [Asthma Action Plan](#) to keep with you
- Have your quick relief medicine with or near you at all times and know your individual triggers
- Make your exercise partner/coaches aware of your asthma in case symptoms or asthma attack occur
- Maintain good asthma control
- Ease into exercise by gradually increasing body movement to familiarize your lungs with heavy breathing

Avoid

Avoid environments with triggers, which may include:

- Mold
- Pollens
- Dust mites
- Pests such as cockroaches & mice
- Tobacco and wood smoke
- Weather changes such as thunderstorms and cold, dry air
- Air pollution, chemical irritants, strong odors
- Pet dander

Do

When it is time to exercise, keep in mind these tips:²

- Take pre-exercise treatment of asthma medicine if prescribed by your healthcare provider
- Do a proper warm-up and cool-down before and after exercising to regulate breathing
- Stay hydrated by drinking water
- When possible, breathe through the nose to warm and moisten the air
- For those who do not have a workout partner, use an emergency alert bracelet in the case that an emergency does occur
- If you are new to exercise, start with asthma-friendly activities such as walking, yoga or golf

React (if necessary)

It is important to know how to react in case of an asthma attack.

- Be able to identify the signs & symptoms of an oncoming attack
- Stop exercise
- Follow your [Asthma Action Plan](#)
- Alert others if in need of assistance or symptoms persist
- Remove yourself from the trigger environment if applicable
- Stay calm and focus on your breathing
- Know when to seek emergency medical attention and call 911 if necessary

Health Benefits of Exercise

If you have asthma, or another chronic respiratory disease, you can still exercise! Before participating in exercise, it is important to maintain good asthma control and talk to your healthcare provider to create a personalized [Asthma Action Plan](#), as well as an exercise plan that includes recommended activities and durations.

Exercise has many benefits for both physical and mental health. Some of the known health benefits of physical activity are³:

- Improved sleep
- Lowered risk of early death and chronic diseases
- Support in daily activities
- Improved muscle and bone health

Exercise improves lung function, increasing the amount of oxygen your body takes in. While consistent exercise can build lung capacity and stamina which can support better overall asthma control, some exercise is better than none.⁴ Exercise can also help reach or maintain a healthy weight. Maintaining a healthy weight helps avoid asthma development and improves asthma control.⁵

Exercise-Induced Bronchoconstriction (EIB),

also known as exercise-induced asthma, is when the airways become tight, narrowed, and inflamed during exercise. This can lead to an asthma attack. EIB can happen to anyone but is most common in people with existing asthma.

Up to

90%

of people with asthma have exercise-induced bronchoconstriction.⁶

Suggested Activities⁷

While all types of exercise and activities are possible with asthma, some are less likely to trigger asthma symptoms. If you are new to exercising, you will need to determine which activities are most suitable for you. Before starting regular exercise, it can be beneficial to start gradually being more active to familiarize your lungs with breathing heavier. **Always consult your healthcare provider before starting new activities.**

- **More likely to trigger EIB:** Activities in cold/dry weather like ice hockey, skiing, ice skating as well as activities with constant movement like long distance running, cycling, basketball, soccer
- **Less likely to trigger EIB:** Lower intensity activities like walking, leisure biking, yoga, golf and activities with short bursts of movement like baseball, volleyball, weightlifting, gymnastics

References

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5. https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/asthma_stats/asthma_obesity.htm
6. <https://aafa.org/asthma/asthma-triggers-causes/exercise-induced-asthma/>

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For additional information on asthma:

www.asthma.in.gov

