



Asthma Exercise and Cold Air

Winter can be a difficult season for people with asthma. Respiratory viruses, such as the common cold, and the flu, can trigger asthma symptoms. Later the flu or cold may evolve into bronchitis or pneumonia. Add to that, the typical Canadian cold winter air and a variety of indoor irritants that come with the holiday season, and you have the potential for a miserable month. The following are some winter tips to help keep you as healthy, so you can fully participate in all seasonal activities.

Cold Air:

- ❖ Avoid outdoor exercise when it's very cold
- ❖ Wear a mask or scarf around your mouth and nose to help warm the air you breathe; breathe in through your nose.

Exercise:

- ❖ If you have asthma symptoms on exertion, stop and rest; use your bronchodilator (reliever) inhaler and only restart the exercise when all your symptoms are gone. This may be a sign you need to evaluate maintenance care.
- ❖ About one in ten members of the Canadian Olympic Team has asthma. They make sure that their asthma is under good control prior to exercising. This helps ensure that asthma symptoms do not interrupt their activity. Exercise is encouraged (except when your asthma is not well controlled) and can be done indoors on very cold days such as in a gym, pool or your home.
- ❖ When asthma stops you from exercising outside in the winter, make sure you take your daily controller medication regularly as prescribed, and if you need your reliever take it. If you use your reliever more than 3 times in one week, make an appointment with your doctor.
- ❖ A bronchodilator (reliever) medication is often prescribed 10 to 20 minutes before exercising to prevent asthma symptoms. Talk to your doctor about this approach if you are having trouble exercising.

Remember:

- ❖ Any symptoms during or following exercise is a sign of poor asthma control.
- ❖ If you have a cold or the flu, see your doctor to get checked.



Respiratory Infections:

Upper respiratory infections can greatly increase the chances of suffering asthma symptoms. If colds and flu make your asthma worse, prevention is the key to keeping your symptoms under control.

- ❖ Avoid contact with large crowds, especially people who have a cold or the flu
- ❖ Make sure to wash your hands frequently with soapy water for at least 20 seconds.
- ❖ Avoid hand-to-eye, mouth and nose contact to prevent spreading of germs.
- ❖ Get a flu shot.
- ❖ Talk to your doctor about a written, individualized [Asthma Action Plan](#) so you know what to do as soon as you feel a cold coming on.

Following the above tips will help you to reduce or eliminate the environmental factors that could trigger an asthma attack during the winter months.

For more information on asthma triggers and how to achieve symptom-free asthma year-round, visit our Taking Control section at [Asthma.ca](#) or call 1-866-787-4050 to order your free Asthma Basics Booklet Series.