



## Asthma and Exercise

### **I have asthma symptoms every time I exercise. Do I have exercise induced asthma?**

Many people with asthma have difficulty breathing when they exercise. However, not all of these people will have exercise induced asthma. More often than not, having symptoms during exercise is a sign that the underlying condition is not well managed.

People who manage their asthma well can participate in most activities, including those that require vigorous exercise. Having asthma does not mean that you cannot exercise. It is a reasonable and attainable goal to be able to participate in sport or recreational activities without experiencing symptoms. However, if you have limitations in your ability to exercise because of asthma symptoms, your asthma is not properly controlled. Talk to your doctor and focus on getting the asthma under control prior to starting an exercise regime.

If your asthma is under total control and you are still having symptoms during or following exercise, you may have exercise induced asthma.

### **What is exercise induced asthma?**

Exercise-induced asthma (EIA) is a condition that occurs when strenuous physical activity results in asthma symptoms 10-15 minutes after starting exercise, or after the activity. If you have breathing problems only when you exercise, your doctor may ask you to take an exercise challenge test where you will either run on a treadmill or pedal a bike for 6-8 minutes. You will do a breathing test before and after the exercise. If you have exercise induced asthma, your breathing test result will be lower after exercise.

### **What are the symptoms of EIA?**

Symptoms of EIA can include any one of, or all of the following: Cough, Wheeze, Chest tightness and Shortness of breath. For some individuals, these symptoms appear after 10-15 minutes of vigorous exercise while others are symptom-free until after the exercise has stopped.



## **What causes exercise induced asthma?**

The average person breathes approximately three litres of air every minute through their nose, when at rest. When exercising, athletes can breathe up to 200 litres a minute during competition and it is through their mouth not their nose. Bypassing the nose means the air that is breathed into the lung is cool, dry and unfiltered. This causes a release of specific chemicals in the airway causing the muscles around the airway to tighten, thus narrowing and obstructing the flow of air.

## **How can EIA be controlled?**

If your doctor has diagnosed you with exercise induced asthma you may be instructed to take your reliever (blue) inhaler 10-15 minutes prior to strenuous exercise. This will allow participation without symptoms. If, however, more reliever is required then the asthma is not under control.

## **Restrict or modify our activities if:**

- The outdoor pollution or pollen index is high
- The temperature is too hot or too cold.
- You have had a recent respiratory viral infection, such as a cold.

## **Always:**

- Ensure an adequate warm-up and cool down.
- The asthma is well controlled prior to activity
- Stop exercise if symptoms occur. Continuing to exercise with symptoms may lead to a severe asthma attack.
- Take your reliever medication, if prescribed, 15 – 20 minutes BEFORE you exercise
- Ensure that your reliever inhaler is accessible.
- Monitor your asthma following the activity- as symptoms may occur up to 30 minutes after stopping.

Exercise can be a powerful trigger for asthma symptoms – can be frightening and lead to reluctance to participate in future activities. This does not have to be. Talk to your doctor.

