Learning to Safely Exercise While Coping With Asthma

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Asthma and Exercise

Exercise can aggravate asthma and so you may be avoiding fitness plans in an effort to better control your condition. If done properly, though, exercising can prove to be an invaluable benefit. It is important to talk to your doctor before starting to exercise.

Is your condition well controlled?

If you can't exercise without experiencing symptoms it is likely because your condition is not well-controlled.

If your disease is stable and you notice symptoms of asthma within 5 -10 minutes after you start working out, it is because you have exercise-induced asthma. This problem develops because your airways react to variations of temperature and humidity (which occur during exercise, especially if you breathe through your mouth). Your doctor can confirm a diagnosis of exercise-induced asthma using a breathing test called spirometry.

Exercising is beneficial for your condition: it helps your lungs and heart work better, increases muscle strength and endurance as well as flexibility and posture, all while lowering your stress levels.

Consult the specialists

Talk to your doctor to see if your condition is stable and you are fit to follow a fitness plan. If you experience exercise-induced asthma you may need changes to your medication.

The next step would be to talk to a physiotherapist or fitness professional who can design a customized plan for you so that you can work out safely and effectively.

If you experience exercise-induced asthma, consider that the following factors can contribute to symptom development: the duration of your workout, ambient temperature, humidity, and whether or not there are allergens or air pollution in the environment. For these reasons it would be safer to choose an indoor workout versus an outdoor exercise. You may also need to take asthma relievers or other medication when you experience symptoms during your workout.

Which activities are safe?

Many asthmatics can tolerate short, intermittent, intense exercises followed by less intense activity, for example HIIT (high intensity interval training) and sports such as volleyball, baseball and wrestling. Swimming is another activity that helps build endurance and is enjoyed and well-tolerated by individuals with asthma, or you can try biking, aerobic training, or walking and running on a treadmill.

On the other hand, workouts that involve long periods of intense activity (i.e. soccer, running long distances) may

aggravate your symptoms. Playing sports in cold weather (i.e. ice hockey, ice skating) may be challenging as well.

Other lifestyle changes

Keep an eye on other lifestyle changes that can help improve asthma symptoms, for example avoiding triggers like smoke, allergens and stress. Adopt a healthy diet based on whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat and fish, and avoid highly processed foods. A multi-vitamin and multi-mineral formula can help, as asthma is associated with certain nutrient deficiencies. Try to take your medications on time, without missing any doses, as recommended by your doctor.