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Exercise-Induced Asthma

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Condition Basics

What is exercise-induced asthma?

Exercise-induced asthma is an asthma attack that happens during or after exercise. It's also called exercise-induced bronchospasm.

When you have an asthma attack, airflow to the lungs is reduced. During an attack, you may feel short of breath. Your chest may feel tight and your breathing may be rapid or shallow. You also may cough or wheeze.

What are the symptoms?

Most people with exercise-induced asthma feel short of breath early in an exercise period. But some people get worse 5 to 10 minutes after exercise stops. Breathing usually gets better within 20 to 30 minutes after you stop the exercise.

If you notice the symptoms of asthma (such as wheezing or shortness of breath) after activity, be sure to tell your doctor. But don't let asthma discourage you from exercising.

Why is it sometimes hard to diagnose exercise-induced asthma?

Most experts agree that it's hard to diagnose exercise-induced asthma during a regular physical exam. That means it often remains undiagnosed, especially in children. So if you or your child notices the symptoms of asthma (such as wheezing or shortness of breath) after activity, it's important to tell your doctor.

How is it treated?

If you have exercise-induced asthma, talk with your doctor about using medicine before exercise. It may help reduce symptoms. It will especially help in cold, dry weather.

Some doctors recommend that:

- You use a quick-relief medicine (called a short-acting beta-2 agonist) about 10 to 30 minutes before you exercise. The effect of this medicine lasts several hours. Examples include:
 - Albuterol (such as Proventil or Ventolin).
 - Levalbuterol (Xopenex).
- You take your long-term controller medicine every day, if needed. This can help reduce airway inflammation. And this can help reduce the overreaction of the airways that carry air to the lungs (bronchial tubes).

Here are some other steps you can take to reduce symptoms when you're active:

- Avoid being exposed to air pollutants and allergens when you can. Exercise indoors when air pollution levels are high.
- Wear a mask or scarf wrapped around your nose and mouth if you exercise in cold weather. This may help warm and moisten the air you breathe in.
- Warm up before strenuous exercise. And slowly increase your activity.

Credits

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