



Exercise-Induced Asthma

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is an inflammatory response to stimuli (trigger factors), such as exercise, causing the lower airways to narrow thus making it difficult to breathe. This inflammatory response causes the lower airways to become red and swollen and the muscles to go into spasm.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ASTHMA?

Signs and symptoms include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- A feeling of tightness in the chest
- Coughing
- Excess mucous production
- Wheezing (when breathing out)

HOW IS ASTHMA TRIGGERED?

There are several triggers for asthma, which can vary from person to person. These include air pollutants, viral infections, inhaled allergens, e.g., pollen, changes in air temperature, certain foods and medications, stress and exercise.

WHAT IS EXERCISE-INDUCED ASTHMA (EIA)?

EIA occurs in 80% of people with asthma; however, increased fitness may decrease symptoms of exercise-induced asthma. Being active is part of good asthma management. Swimming is an excellent activity for asthmatics who have trouble with land-based exercise.

When we are at rest, we normally breathe through our nose. Breathing through the nose warms and moistens the air we are inhaling. When we exercise we tend to breathe faster and through our mouth. The mouth is less effective in keeping inhaled air warm and moist, which means that the air reaching our lungs (specifically the bronchioles) is colder and drier. It is thought that this colder, drier air irritates the airways and causes the airways to tighten.

Symptoms often occur soon after exercise, rather than during the actual exercise and can also occur during prolonged, strenuous exercise.

PREVENTION

1. Good asthma control:

Have an action plan written by your doctor, and inform your Personal Trainer/Gym Instructor of the plan. Regularly visit your doctor to review your Asthma Action Plan, even when feeling well.

2. Use of medication:

For relief during an attack use a blue inhaler (puffer) such as: Ventolin, Bricanyl, Asmol, or Airomir, 5 to 10 minutes BEFORE warm up. For prevention some individuals use medications such as Intal, Intal Forte and Tilade (not during an attack). An individual suffering from EIA should always check with their doctor which inhaler is best for them.

3. Carry your own reliever with you to each workout/training session:

Do not rely on your Personal Trainer or Gym to have a reliever medication available. It is your responsibility to bring the appropriate medication to training.

4. Always warm-up before workouts/training:

A warm-up plan may include:

- 2 to 3 minute jog to raise a light sweat
- Stretch: 5 to 15 minutes. Include all major muscle groups during stretching
- Either: 5 to 7 X 30 second sprints with one minute rest in between or a brisk walk or slow jog for 20 to 30 minutes.

5. Always cool down after workouts/training:

A cool down plan may include:

- 3 minute light jog or easy walk after exercise
- 5 to 10 minutes stretching.

Remember: symptoms of EIA can occur soon after the completion of exercise, rather than during exercise; therefore always have your reliever medication near at hand.

6. Identify what triggers your asthma:

Be aware of your trigger factors and the environmental influences that may cause your asthma.

By Ory de Fina, BAppSc (Human Movement), RegFL

Ory is the Managing Director of Re:VIVA First Aid Training.