

exercise-induced asthma

Do you love to work out but find yourself coughing or wheezing during or after exercise? Do you often fight headaches or stomach pain after a run? You may have exercise-induced asthma (EIA).

The good news is that people who suffer from EIA can still exercise safely and successfully. If you suspect you have EIA, see your physician and consider these suggestions from Mariana Shedden, MS, a doctoral student in exercise science at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque (UNMA), and Len Kravitz, PhD, senior exercise physiologist for IDEA and coordinator of exercise science at UNMA, where he also conducts research.

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What Is EIA?

Chronic asthma is the result of an inflammation in the passageways of the lung. An asthmatic's lungs are particularly sensitive to triggers such as dust mites, tobacco smoke, pollen, animal dander, cold air and environmental irritants. Symptoms can include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness.

People with **exercise-induced asthma** may show many of the same symptoms as sufferers of chronic asthma, with the symptoms occurring during or after exercise. Some individuals may also experience stomach pain, cramps and headaches. Many exercisers who note these symptoms just assume that the problem is simply that they are out of shape, and thus do not seek medical advice.

If you suffer from EIA, you fall into one of two groups. One group shows symptoms of asthma *only* during or after exercise, but does not react to any of the other triggers of chronic asthma. The second group has chronic asthma as well as EIA, and exercise is just one of the factors that trigger asthmatic symptoms.

exercise recommendations

Before you begin an exercise program, seek your physician's clearance. Plus, consider these suggestions for a safe, attack-free workout session:

- When practical, avoid the types of exercise that are most conducive to EIA. Outdoor running is regarded as the workout most likely to cause symptoms. Next in line are treadmill running and cycling.
- If possible, do exercises that are less likely to trigger symptoms of EIA. Aquatic exercise is good because warm and humid air near the water surface helps prevent the cooling and drying of lung airways. Exercising indoors, as long as the air is unpolluted, is generally preferable to exercising outdoors. Stop-and-go sports and team games like tennis and volleyball lead to less EIA for some people.
- Try a prolonged cooldown after exercising. Yoga may enhance relaxation and exercise tolerance.
- Plan a long warm-up of approximately 15 minutes at a low-to-moderate intensity.
- Make sure you are properly hydrated before, during and after exercise.
- In the case of an asthma attack, immediately decrease exercise intensity. If symptoms do not subside, seek medical attention.



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Benefits of Exercise

If you exercise safely with EIA, you can get the following benefits:

- increased cardiorespiratory fitness
- increased work capacity
- improved exercise endurance
- reduced perception of breathlessness
- reduced anxiety about physical activity
- possible alleviation of asthma symptoms
- possible decrease in the use of inhaled and oral steroids

Whether you just have EIA or also suffer from chronic asthma, you may need to take medication before exercise to prevent symptoms. Check with your doctor to see what type of medication you need and how often and when you should take it.

Wear a Mask or Scarf in Cold Weather.

Doing so may increase the temperature and humidity of the inhaled air, reducing irritation to the air passageways.

Avoid Certain Exercise Environments.

Don't work out in places that are high in pollutants, pollen and other asthma triggers (e.g. a recently mowed grass field, an area with many flowers, high-traffic roadways).

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Avoiding Attacks

How can you prevent attacks while working out? Try some of these tips plus ideas from the

"Exercise Recommendations" sidebar.

Find Out if You Need Medication.

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