

Asthma shouldn't stop sufferers from exercising

After a hard workout, many people find it hard to catch their breath.

This is particularly true for people who suffer from asthma.

Most asthmatics begin to wheeze, cough, experience shortness of breath and tightness in the chest during or a few minutes after exercise.

The symptoms are usually mild and only last for 20 to 30 minutes.

This is called exercise-induced asthma.

What causes exercise-induced asthma?

Current research suggests exercise-induced asthma is due to the airways cooling and drying.

This results in the release of chemicals from the airways' cells, causing the muscles which circle around the airways to tighten, narrowing and obstructing the flow of air.

Some exercise-induced asthma also appears to result from breathing cold, dry air which dries out and irritates the inner lining of the airways.

Can asthmatics still exercise?

Several past Olympic athletes have asthma, so it's no excuse to stop exercising.

Exercise strengthens the heart and body muscles, relieves stress and improves a sense of well-being.

A benefit of regular exercise for asthmatics is that it allows them to make a daily assessment of their lung capacity.

Swimming, gymnastics and

fitness programs are good exercises for asthmatics because each allows them to participate at their own level. Once the asthma is under control asthmatics can participate in any sport.

Regardless, asthmatics may need to take rest breaks while they exercise. It is also important for asthmatics to use medication before exercise to prevent asthma symptoms or an attack.

What treatments are available for asthmatics?

Medication plays an important role in treating and managing asthma. Up to now, there have been two main types of asthma treatment - bronchodilators and anti-inflammatory.

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Bronchodilators help relieve asthma attacks once they have started, while anti-inflammatories are taken regularly to keep the bronchial

tubes open and help prevent asthma attacks from starting.

A new class of asthma medication, called leukotriene receptor antagonists, is under development and is the first asthma treatment advance in more than a decade.

The treatment has been extremely well-tolerated in clinical trials and is an effective addition to today's standard therapies.

The purpose of asthma medicines is to help asthmatics control their asthma, making them feel better and allowing them to do what they want.

Tips for exercising with asthma

- ✓ Do not begin exercise when you have symptoms of your asthma.
- ✓ Always warm-up and cool down.
- ✓ Use medications as prescribed.

- ✓ Always stop exercising if an asthma attack develops.
- ✓ If your asthma is bothered by air pollution, cold or damp air, exercise indoors.

- ✓ Cover your mouth and nose with a scarf when exercising outdoors in cold weather.
- ✓ Speak with your physician before beginning any exercise program.

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