

ASTHMA AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



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HEALTH

Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. If you have asthma, it is important to exercise because physical activity can help you to:

- Control your asthma.
- Maintain your weight or lose weight.
- Increase your energy.
- Decrease stress and anxiety.
- Lower your risk of getting sick.
- Improve your heart health.

However, asthma symptoms can flare up when you are physically active or exercising. You can learn how to control your asthma and prevent symptoms during exercise. This will help you remain physically active.

How can asthma affect my ability to be physically active?

When you have asthma, physical activity can cause you to have symptoms such as:

- Wheezing. This may sound like whistling while breathing.
- A feeling of tightness in the chest, or chest pain.
- A sore throat.
- Coughing.
- Shortness of breath.
- Tiredness (fatigue) with minimal activity.
- Increased sputum production.

What actions can I take to prevent asthma problems during physical activity?

Start by sticking to your daily asthma medicine regimen. Keeping your asthma under control will allow you to enjoy exercise and sports participation.

Asthma action plan

Follow the asthma action plan set by your health care provider. Your personal asthma plan may include:

- Taking your daily controller (maintenance) asthma medicines as told by your health care provider.
- Using your rescue inhaler before exercise as told by your health care provider.
- Avoiding your asthma triggers, except physical activity. Triggers may include cold air, dust, pollen, pet dander, and air pollution.

- Being aware of worsening symptoms.
- Tracking your asthma control.
- Using a peak flow meter.
- Knowing when to seek emergency care.

Proper breathing

During exercise, follow these tips for proper breathing:

- Breathe in before starting the exercise and breathe out during the part of the exercise that takes the most effort.
- Take slow breaths.
- Pace yourself. **Do not** try to go too fast.
- While breathing out, purse your lips.

Before beginning any exercise program or new activity, talk with your health care provider.

Pulmonary rehabilitation

Ask your health care provider about signing up for a pulmonary rehabilitation program. Benefits of this type of program include:

- Education on lung diseases.
- Classes that teach you how to exercise and be more active while decreasing your shortness of breath.
- A group setting that allows you to talk with others who have asthma.

General information

- Exercise indoors when the air is dry or during allergy season.
- Try to breathe in warm, moist air by wearing a scarf loosely over your nose and mouth or breathing only through your nose.
- Spend a few minutes warming up before you exercise or begin an activity or workout.
- Cool down after exercise.

What should I do if my asthma symptoms get worse?

Contact your health care provider if your asthma symptoms are getting worse. Your asthma is getting worse if:

- You have symptoms more often.
- Your symptoms are more severe.
- Your symptoms get worse at night and make you lose sleep.

- Your peak flow number is lower than your personal best or changes from day to day.
- Your asthma medicines do not work as well as they used to.
- You use your rescue inhaler more often. If you use your rescue inhaler more than 2 days a week, your asthma is not well controlled.
- You go to the emergency room or see your health care provider because of an asthma attack.

Where can I get more information?

- Ask your health care provider about asthma support groups in your area.
- American Lung Association: [lung.org](https://www.lung.org)
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: [nhlbi.nih.gov](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

Contact a health care provider if:

- You have trouble walking and talking because you are out of breath.

Get help right away if:

- Your lips or fingernails are blue.
- You are not able to breathe or catch your breath.

These symptoms may represent a serious problem that is an emergency. Do not wait to see if the symptoms will go away. Get medical help right away. Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.). Do not drive yourself to the hospital.

Summary

- Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. However, if you have asthma, your symptoms can flare up during exercise or physical activity.
- You can prevent problems during physical activity by following your asthma action plan, doing proper breathing, and enrolling in a pulmonary rehabilitation program.
- Talk with your health care provider before starting any exercise program or new activity.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.