What is Exercise-induced Asthma?
Most people who have poorly controlled asthma will have symptoms with exercise. Some people may have asthma symptoms that are only brought on by exercise. This form of asthma is called exercise-induced asthma (or EIA). Common symptoms of asthma that can occur with exercise are coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest pain or tightness, tiredness, and difficulty keeping up with others.

Asthma symptoms can occur during vigorous activity, but usually start 5-10 minutes after stopping the activity. Sometimes symptoms of asthma can return hours later. Whether exercise brings on asthma symptoms may depend on how long you are active, how intense the activity is, and the environment where you exercise. Very intense sports such as swimming, soccer, and long-distance running are most likely to cause asthma symptoms but do not always need to be avoided since the symptoms can usually be controlled.

Asthma symptoms may occur with exposure to triggers in the environment where exercise is taking place. For example, a person may breathe comfortably indoors on a basketball court, but will have asthma symptoms when running in a grassy field or ice skating in cold weather. Triggers that can be a problem include outside temperature, humidity, air pollution, pollen or molds in the air, and chemical fumes including those found at some ice rinks and pools. The triggers that affect you may be different from triggers that affect someone else.

How to Prevent Asthma Problems with Exercise
To stay active with asthma, or to become more active, these steps can help: 1) identify your exercise-induced asthma triggers, 2) take your pre-treatment asthma medicine, 3) warm up before exercise, and 4) end with a cool-down exercise.

Identify your exercise-induced asthma triggers
■ If cold air triggers your asthma, you can try wearing a scarf or cold weather mask over your nose and mouth to warm the air. Try to breathe through your nose when exercising.
■ If you have allergies to any molds or pollens, check mold or pollen counts and avoid outdoor activity when the counts are very high.
■ Usually air pollution levels are highest during the midday or afternoon. Ozone is a common outdoor air pollutant in the summer months. When the levels are high, you should avoid outdoor activities. Check the Air Quality Index updates in your local newspaper, television or radio weather reports. Air quality information for many U.S. cities is also available on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) AIRNow website (http://www.airnow.gov).

Pre-treatment Asthma Medicines
There are several kinds of medicine that can be given before exercise to prevent asthma symptoms. Both bronchodilator and anti-inflammatory medicines can be used.
**Bronchodilators** (medicines that open your airways by relaxing the muscles around your breathing tubes). There are two types of bronchodilators, short-acting or long-acting. Both types are used to prevent asthma symptoms.

Short-acting bronchodilators include albuterol and levalbuterol. You should take your short-acting bronchodilator 15–30 minutes before starting to exercise. It will not last longer than 2–4 hours. Even if you take your short-acting bronchodilator before you exercise, you can use it again as a “reliever medicine” if you have symptoms during or after exercise.

**Anti-inflammatory medicines** (medicines used to prevent swelling in your breathing tubes). These include both corticosteroid (such as beclomethasone, budesonide, flunisolide, fluticasone, mometasone, triamcinolone) and non-steroid medicines (such as montelukast and zafirlukast). Anti-inflammatory medicines are usually taken on a regular schedule to control your asthma. They are called “controller medicines”. You may not notice any immediate improvement when you use these medicines. They can take time to work. If you have regular asthma symptoms (more than twice a week during the day or twice a month at night) should talk to your health care provider about using a controller medicine.

**Getting Fit**
If you are overweight or have not been getting regular exercise, you may be out of shape or in poor physical condition. Poor conditioning can make a person feel out of breath and be confused with asthma symptoms. Lack of physical fitness makes exercise seem harder and a person may feel out of breath sooner. It takes time and effort to build physical fitness and get in good shape. Make a plan to get in good condition gradually.

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